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THWARTED;

OR,

DUCKS' EGGS IN A HEN'S NEST.

A STORY.

BY

FLORENCE MONTGOMERY,

AUTHOR OF "THROWN TOGETHER," "MISUNDERSTOOD," ETC.

PHILADELPHIA:

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

1874.

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TO

MY YOUNGEST BROTHER,

ALEC,

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CONTENTS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

The Washerwoman and her Family 9

CHAPTER II.

The Quiet Little Village of Grinfield 15

CHAPTER III.

The Brother and Sister's Walk Home 22

CHAPTER IV.

Trying to get at the Past 30

CHAPTER V.

The Fairy at the Big House 41

CHAPTER VI.

The Letter from Bournby 66

Digitized by Google

PART II.

CHAPTER VII.

PAGE

The Burden of a Double Secret 84

CHAPTER VIII.

The Parable of the Talents 93

CHAPTER IX.

The Sister's Self-Sacrifice 103

CHAPTER X.

The Fairy Child at the Infant-school 111

CHAPTER XI.

The Sister's Reward 122

CHAPTER XII.

The Bonbon Box 130

CHAPTER XIII.

The Mystery Cleared Up 140

CHAPTER XIV.

The Great Carver's Greatest Work 152

CHAPTER XV.

After Ten Years 160

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THWARTED.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE WASHERWOMAN AND HER FAMILY.

It was Christmas time in the little village of Grinfield.

The snow lay thick and crisp on the hard ground, and all the ponds in the neighborhood were well frozen over.

It was bright winter weather, and the sun was shining in cheerfully at the open door of a cottage at the end of the lane, where lived a poor washerwoman, a widow, and her three children.

The inside of the cottage was scrupulously neat and clean; a good fire crackled merrily in the grate, and a substantial-looking pot was sending forth a savory smell.

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Near the fire sat a little boy, making a wooden soldier, and a nice-looking girl of eighteen was laying the cloth for dinner.

The widow herself, with arms bared to the elbow, was standing at a table in the window, sorting some clothes, preparatory to putting them into the wash-tub.

Though worn with hard work, and prematurely gray, she was evidently still young, and it was easy to see she must once have been very handsome. She had, even now, far more claim to real beauty than her young daughter, though the girl was more pleasing-looking, from having an air of greater refinement.

The mother was cast in a coarser mould. She was on a larger scale, though she was not so tall; and she was far more strongly built. Her hands and arms were large and brawny, and looked as if they had done much work in their day, and done it well.

There was energy and determination in her quick step and in her large dark eye. She worked with a will even while sorting the clothes; and there was that about her whole appearance and in the deep lines in her forehead which seemed to tell

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of a woman who had fought a hard battle with life and had come off conqueror.

The girl moved about quietly, and went through all the preparations for the mid-day meal without hurry or commotion.

She was slighter and fairer than her mother. Her hands bore little or no trace of hard work, and the expression of her face was calmer and more thoughtful.

Still, it was not without traces of resolution; and it was in this that the two faces were alike.

"Where is Bill, mother?"

A shade passed over the widow's face, and something like a sigh escaped her.

"He came home from the farm, but I sent him up to the Big House with some clothes."

"Why do you sigh, mother?" asked the young girl, rather quickly.

"Bill's got one of his queer fits on him to-day," she answered. "I did hope he was taking to his work at the farm, and giving his mind to it like a sensible lad; but to-day he seems as bad as ever."

"I wonder what brought it on to-day in particular," said Bessie, half to herself.

"How is one to tell?" said Mrs. Tarver, harshly;

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"why can't he be contented with his lot? I've no patience with him. Hacking away with a knife and a bit of wood every spare moment he's got, instead of going heart and soul into his farm-work. I know it sends him back to the farm discontented every time, instead of being thankful that he's got such a start in life. I often wish," she added with a sigh, "that God Almighty wouldn't bestow talents where there's no means of making any use of them."

Bessie did not echo her mother's wish. She gloried in her brother's talents, and in the certainty that he was meant for something better than a day-laborer.

She knew no more than her mother how this meaning in his life was to be brought out; but she was younger and more hopeful.

The unknown path of life stretching before her was full of possibilities; and her young eyes looked out upon a vista of brightness which the poor widow's were too worn with work and tears to see.

"And I'm afraid," the washerwoman went on, glancing wrathfully at the little boy by the fire, "that Bill's example is leading Charlie the same

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silly road. The child's always messing with a bit of wood, wasting his time. I've a good mind, Bessie, to stop it with him at once, like I've often wished I'd done to Bill years ago."

"You couldn't have stopped Bill carving by *telling*, mother," said the girl proudly, "any more than you could have put your hand on his head and told him not to grow. He's the tallest lad in the village," she added, as if to change the subject.

"Worse luck," said the washerwoman. "How to keep him neat and respectable I don't know. Why, do what I will, his arms are always too long for his jacket-sleeves, and his trousers half-way up his legs. If he grew stout at the same time, and more fit for his farming, like I've been used to see my brothers grow down in Lincolnshire, well and good; but instead of that, he's as slim as a young fir-tree; and the farmers give him less wages than the others, because he can't get through so much work. But there! it is no use talking about it. One must take one's children as God Almighty sends them, and be thankful they're no worse. For with all his cranks, Bill's a good son to me, and you're a good girl, too, Bessie," she went on, "though you're obstinate about the washing. I've

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often told you that you and I together might take in double the washing, and make twice the money. But it's no use talking."

"But think when I'm an infant-schoolmistress, mother, and making perhaps twenty or thirty pounds a year!"

"Ah, well! I daresay. But all this extra schooling comes heavy. But none of you take to hard work, so I must just work all the harder myself to make up for it."

And the washerwoman bustled away into the wash-house, and was heard splashing energetically as she rinsed out the clothes.

Poor thing! Like the hen in the fable, she had hatched ducks' eggs in her nest, and now she found the creatures she had expected to be little barn-door chickens, developing powers of which she knew nothing, and eager to dash into waters which she had never dared approach.

In vain she stood cackling on the brink, striving to recall them to the barn-door life that had ever seemed to her so all-sufficient.

She could not follow them, and they would not heed her cry.

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CHAPTER II.

THE QUIET LITTLE VILLAGE OF GRINFIELD.

DINNER being now ready, Bessie called her mother from the wash-house, and then went to the cottage door to see if her brother was in sight.

Shading her eyes with her hand, she stood gazing down the road, till in the distance she saw him coming slowly along.

"He's coming, mother," she said, returning into the cottage; and they began dinner.

Bill came in almost immediately after. A tall, slightly-built youth of about seventeen; in every respect as unlike one's idea of a farm-laborer as could possibly be.

He had an earnest, thoughtful face, with a tinge about it of slight melancholy.

He had the same rather delicate features as his sister.

He was very unlike his mother, except in the

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one point in which Bessie also resembled her—the expression of determination about the eyes and forehead.

He took his place at the table, but hurried over his meal as if he were only going through the farce of eating because he must.

He soon rose, and saying he had something to finish before going back to the farm, he disappeared into the adjoining room.

"He's eaten nothing," said the widow as soon as he was gone.

"But he's drunk a lot," said Charlie, hopefully, as he turned over Dick's water-mug, which he had drained to the dregs.

"He'll not get stout upon that," sighed the washerwoman, as she rose from the table, and began clearing away the things.

Bessie now prepared to return to the village school for the afternoon. She was an unpaid pupil-teacher, and was hoping soon to pass the examination which would qualify her for the post of an infant-schoolmistress.

This had been her ambition from early youth, and the thought of its approaching fulfillment often made her heart beat high.

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She had a natural talent for teaching. It seemed born in her. Long ago, the schoolmistress had seen that the infants under Bessie's tuition learnt twice as fast, and with twice as much delight, as under that of any of the other teachers. She seemed able to be at once clear and attractive in her manner of imparting instruction, and to have the power of gaining the most fidgety child's attention.

Under these circumstances her future career seemed mapped out for her, and the village schoolmistress educated her for that end.

Bessie had stuck to her intention with gentle pertinacity, in spite of her mother's wish for her to take advantage of a vacant scullery-maid's place at the "Big House," or her equally earnest desire that her daughter should join her in the labors of washing and clear-starching.

Bessie felt that she was fitted for higher things, and also that in the end it would be more advantageous for her mother as well as for herself.

She lamented, certainly, that the extra years of schooling necessary to fit her for her vocation should for the present be an extra expense to her mother; but she hoped to pay her back a hundred-

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fold some day, and be the means of loading her declining years with every kind of comfort.

She had always been upheld in her ambition by her brother, who was proud of her talents, and could not bear the thought of their being thrown away.

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," had been the widow's bitter exclamation when she saw that the scullery-maid's place (in her eyes so rare and so valuable an opening in life) was to slip from the grasp by which she would fain have detained it.

She could hardly bear with patience to see it pass away from her family; and was not so sanguine as her children as to the distant infant-schoolmistress-ship; not seeing who was to interest themselves sufficiently in her girl to procure her such an appointment.

The village in which the family of Tarver lived was certainly not a propitious atmosphere for the development of native talent, or one that paved the way for the rise in life of its young inhabitants.

It was an isolated and somewhat neglected district. The civilizing power of a local railway was as yet unknown. The nearest station was fourteen miles off, and the market-town nearly ten.

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There were no large landed proprietors' houses in the near neighborhood. The land round about the village belonged to the "Big House," and so did the surrounding farms and cottages.

It was altogether a behind-the-times, old-fashioned kind of place. The "Big House," which by its name might lead the stranger to suppose it to be a star of the first magnitude, was only so called by comparison with the lesser lights of the village among which it stood; and was inhabited by an invalid lady and her little girl.

What time this lady had in her short day (for she never rose till two) was, of course, devoted to her child.

So that leaders of schemes, and promoters of progress and good works, there were none.

"Aide-toi" was, therefore, the only motto for aspiring young spirits after this world's good in the quiet little village of Grinfield.

"Bill, it's past the quarter," said Bessie, looking into her brother's room, with her bonnet on.

It was an untidy little place. Bits of wood and pieces of carving lay about in every direction; and unfinished designs on stray bits of paper were scattered about on the floor.

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In the midst of the confusion sat Bill, with his carving on his lap, working away with a penknife, and completely absorbed in his occupation.

It was a wonderfully pretty creation that was growing out of the rough wood under his hand, and Bessie gazed at it with admiration.

"How you *have* got on with it since yesterday, Bill!"

"Yes," the boy answered, looking up excitedly, his face very unlike the quiet, thoughtful face it had been at dinner; "but I've just got to a difficulty, Bess; and I don't see how I am to get past it."

His eyes sparkled as he spoke with a look half of determination, half of disappointment; his head went down again, and he hacked away fiercely.

"It's no use," he burst out after a minute; "the difficulty would be nothing with proper tools; but with this wretched knife——" and with something like a sob, he flung it to the other end of the room.

"Never mind, Bill, dear," said Bessie, softly; "try again to-night, when you're not so hurried; you had better come now."

But even while she spoke he had picked up the knife, and was working away as hard as ever.

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"Well, I'll walk slowly on, Bill, and perhaps you'll overtake me. But if by any chance you don't, will you come and fetch me this evening? It's my day to study with the mistress after the school's broke up, and it'll be dark before I get home."

He murmured something unintelligible, and she left him. Charlie was ready to start, and they walked on leisurely, so as to give Bill every chance of overtaking them.

But when they reached the schools he was still in the far distance; so Bessie had to give him up, for the clock struck the hour for afternoon school, and her little class was waiting.

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CHAPTER III.

THE BROTHER AND SISTER'S WALK HOME.

ABOUT two hours after, Bessie came out of the school, and found Bill walking up and down waiting for her.

The brother and sister walked along the road for some time in silence. At last Bessie said,—

"What's made you so thoughtful all day to-day, Bill? Is there anything particular you've been thinking about?"

"Yes!" he answered so vehemently that he quite startled her; "thinking what a wretched thing it is to live in a little out-of-the-way hole like this place, where there's nothing ever doing or stirring; and where nobody does anything to help a poor man to improve himself."

"What's put it more particularly into your thoughts to-day, Bill?"

"Reading this, for one thing," he answered, pulling a magazine out of his pocket, "and seeing how different it all is in other places."

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"And the other thing?" questioned Bessie.

"What I saw up at the Big House last night," he answered, turning his face eagerly towards her.

"What was that, Bill?"

"A beautiful tool-box, Bess, just come down from London. The footman asked me to help him to unpack it. You never saw anything half so delightful. Every sort of delicious tool to make a difficulty easier than *no* difficulty with a penknife. A saw, a chisel, a gimlet, etc., etc."

Bessie could hardly follow the excited enumeration, but she watched the gusto with which the boy pronounced the name of every tool.

"And what were you reading in the magazine, Bill?"

He handed it to her, and she glanced over the article he indicated.

The subject was the progress of art in England during the last twenty or thirty years; and the discovery and development of talent of all kinds among all classes.

There was a list of institutions established where struggling artists, whose talents would otherwise have run to waste, can now have the best instruction for next to nothing.

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Among other advantages held out for improving the taste of the public was mentioned the opening of exhibitions, where all the great people of England sent the works of the old masters that had been handed down in their families from generation to generation, so that all might see and profit by them.

Having read thus far, Bessie looked up and said, "Well, but, Bill, there is nothing to complain of in this. What more would you have? This goes to prove that the poor in these days have quite as many advantages as the rich. Artists learn in London, you see, for next to nothing."

"Do *we* live in London?" he retorted. "That is just what I complain of."

"Well, no," said Bessie, slowly; "but still——"

"But still," he said impatiently, "but still we live in this little out-of-the-way behind-the-times Grinfield, while in London every advantage is offered free. I am nearly seventeen; I would work day and night at carving willingly and gladly, and I *know* I could turn it to account; and for want of instruction and opportunity, I am doomed to work all my life long in a farm-yard, because I should starve if I didn't. Oh, Bessie! I am sorely tempted

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sometimes to start off, like Dick Whittington, and find my way to London. Once there, I should succeed, I know."

Bessie looked rather frightened.

"Well, read on," he said, relapsing into his usual quiet manner; "you haven't got beyond London yet. If it was only London, I shouldn't mind so much, for I should feel I was no worse off than any other country lad. But see what it says after."

The article went on to say how the march of enlightenment had spread into country towns, hamlets, villages, colliery districts, and all over the land.

Institutions on a smaller scale were enumerated, which had served to draw out local talent, as well as to foster and encourage general improvement.

First on the list came Village Industrial Exhibitions. Then followed book clubs, evening lectures in parish schools, penny readings, agricultural shows, flower shows, etc., etc.

Examples were given of men and boys who, by means of the first institution, had been found to possess tastes and talents hitherto unsuspected, and had been sent up to London to profit by the advantages there.

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One example there was, and that the last one, of a youth who had for years employed all his leisure time in carving; who, by means of an industrial exhibition in the neighborhood, had had his talents brought under the notice of a gentleman, who had interested himself to procure the boy a situation in a great furniture warehouse in London, at a rate of wages sufficient to support him entirely at the time, with a hope of steady increase in the future.

At this point Bessie saw her brother's eye fixed upon her with such a hungry expression, that she could hardly help laughing.

She restrained herself, however, and said, as she gave him back the magazine, "I wish something of the sort would happen to you, dear Bill!"

"But it never will," he answered bitterly. "I shall live and die a farm-laborer in this wretched little place."

They walked on a little way in silence, and then Bill broke out again: "Why, not one of the things that article speaks of as common to every little country village is even *known* here. I don't mean the grander things, but such simple things as book clubs and night schools. We don't even have a

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flower show! I can't *think*, Bessie, how mother ever came to settle here. Of all places in the world to choose! She must have had all England to choose from when my father died!"

"I wonder where we lived before," said Bessie, meditatively.

"I shall ask mother this very night," exclaimed Bill.

Bessie shook her head.

"Better not, Bill; you know how she hates being questioned. It seems as if she couldn't bear being asked anything about her former life. Besides, it's no good, for she won't answer."

"But I'm not sure she has any right to hide everything about my father from us," said Bill. "We are not babies now, and if there's any secret, we ought to know it. *I* ought, at any rate. Why, I don't even know what he was, or where he lived, or anything about him. I think it's rather hard upon me. It makes me think I don't know what. I declare, sometimes it has crossed my mind that perhaps he was a thief, or something of that kind: and that that's why mother is so close about him."

"It's nothing of that kind, I'm sure," said Bessie;

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"there's no bitterness in my mother's mind about him. It's not with shame she mentions his name when she *does* speak of him. There's great trouble and sorrow connected with him; but nothing but that, Bill, you may depend upon it."

"Well then, I say it's wrong to keep one so much in the dark as to leave room for such horrible suspicions," said Bill; "and I shall tell mother that's what the result of her being so mysterious has been."

"No, you won't, Bill. You're too good to do that, I know. You've often threatened this kind of thing before; but when the moment comes, you're too tender-hearted to do it. Mother's a widow, and you are her eldest son. You never forget that."

"Well, no," he answered; "I shouldn't be working in a farm-yard now if it wasn't for that. I should be on the road to London, with a bundle on my back; to work my way as other adventurers have done before me!" His eyes sparkled at the thought.

"But I couldn't desert mother," he added with a sigh; "particularly as it might be many years before I should make any money to help her with.

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And as it is, of course my farm earnings help to keep the pot boiling. But I shall lead up the conversation to-night, Bessie, after Charlie has gone to bed; and try to find out what could have induced her to settle in this place. There's no harm in that."

They reached the cottage-door as he spoke, and found their mother waiting supper for them. Charlie was already in bed.

The meal was soon over, and cleared away. Bessie got out her work, and the widow began to darn Bill's socks. The fire crackled merrily, and for a time all three were silent.

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CHAPTER IV.

TRYING TO GET AT THE PAST.

"MOTHER," said Bill, suddenly, "how was it we ever came to live here?"

The widow looked up sharply, and said, "Ever *came* to live here! Why, we've always lived here."

"Not always, mother. You've often told me none of us, not even Charlie, were born here."

"Well, we've lived here as long as *you* can remember, anyhow," she retorted.

Bessie glanced at her brother, as if to beg him to drop the subject, as he had so often had to do on former occasions; but Bill was not to be silenced to-night.

"Where did we live," he said, returning to the charge, "before we came here?"

"At Bournby in Lincolnshire," she answered; "in my father's home."

"Was our father alive then?" pursued Bill.

"No," she answered, very unwillingly.

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"Oh, then, that's not what I mean: what I want to know is, where we lived before that—before our father died. Where was it, mother?"

The direct question seemed to deprive the widow of the powers of evasion she had always hitherto so successfully practiced, whenever her children had touched on these forbidden topics. Bill, too, was so much bolder and more determined than usual, and she answered, almost as if she could not help herself, "In London." But she was not prepared for the effect her answer would have upon her son.

"In London!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet, and crimsoning with excitement. "Oh, Bessie! Bessie! do you hear that? In London!"

Bessie felt for him sincerely, as he stood there flushed and breathless.

She knew well the thoughts that were racing through his brain of all that life in London might have done for him: of all the advantages to be found there, that he had that very afternoon enumerated.

But she felt also for her mother, who had dropped her work, and was looking at him with a half-scared look, as if asking the reason of this sudden outburst.

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"Bless me, Bill," exclaimed the widow, "are you gone crazy? What's the matter with you?"

"It makes me crazy to think of it," he cried; "to have lived in London, and to have left it! To have had such a chance, and to have thrown it away! Mother! mother! how could you do such a thing! Oh! *what* wouldn't I give to be living there now!"

"You're a foolish boy," she said angrily, roused by his implied reproach; "you don't know what you're talking about, nor where you're well off. London indeed! So that's your idea of good fortune and happiness, is it? *London!* A place overcrowded and overstocked with workers, treading on each other's heels, and not work to be found for the half of them! Oh, my God!" she exclaimed suddenly, dropping her work and covering her face with her hands, "*how* wretched I have been in London!"

Bessie glanced imploringly at her brother, and signed to him to stop the conversation.

Bill drew near to his mother, touched by the sight of her distress.

"Little Mother," he said coaxingly, stroking her work-worn hands, "won't you tell us what made

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you sad in those old days? Won't you at last tell us something about our father, and our early life?"

His words and manner seemed to stir her strangely. The tears came into her eyes.

"I'll not have you call me that, William," she said very softly, and her voice seemed to dwell fondly and with a peculiar intonation on the liquid sounds that make up the name.

"Why?" asked Bessie, gently; "did my father call you so?"

"Yes," said the widow, as she dashed away a tear; "but it's long ago, children, oh! its very long ago.

"I was very young to be married, and when you were born, Bessie, your father used to laugh to see me with you, because I looked, he said, like a child playing with its doll. So that's what he used to call me. Ah! those were happy days, before the troubles came."

"What troubles, mother?"

"What troubles?" she said, wearily, "every kind. Poverty, sickness, ruin, starvation, and disgrace. That's all that's to be got of living in London, that I can see."

"But why disgrace?" said Bill, slightly frown-

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ing; and his heart began to beat a little from fear of what he might be going to hear.

"Doesn't poverty," she retorted sharply, "bring difficulties, and difficulties debt, and debt disgrace? —— there! that will do. Let's talk of something else."

"Did we go straight to Bournby from London after father died?" asked Bill.

"For a time we did," she answered; "and then I went into service, and left you three children with your grandfather."

"And where was your situation, mother?"

"Here," she answered, "at Grinfield, with Mrs. Herbert at the Big House. Her husband was alive then, and he was related to a lady living near Bournby; so that's how I heard of the place. But I didn't stay long, for I couldn't bear being parted from all of you. So, when the village laundress died, I set up for myself in this little cottage, and sent for you children here. And here we've lived ever since, and I've often thanked God for the quiet untroubled life we've led. Just enough, and no more, certainly, but still we've been free from cares and struggles, and above all, free from debt. My only wish for you all has always been that you

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should live the same, and be kept out of all I've had to bear. I've had no higher ambition for you. That's all I've got to tell. Don't bother me with any more questions."

There was evidently nothing more to be got out of her; and the subject would have dropped then and there if Bill had not heaved a deep sigh and said half to himself, "Well! I wish we'd settled anywhere else. If not London, then not in England at all, but in Germany."

The widow looked up sharply. "Germany!" she exclaimed, "what on earth put such an idea into your head?"

"Something I've read here," he answered, producing his magazine: "Germany's the place in these days, depend upon it. What with its education, and its army, and the advantages that it offers to poor artists, and the like, there's no place like it. There's an article here that says the only reason the German poor are so much cleverer with their fingers than the English poor is, that their tastes are more drawn out, and aided. Why, the improvement in England in these respects in the last twenty years is all due to the Germans. It was the Prince Consort that introduced and promoted all the taste,

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and all the institutions in London. If I'd been born a German, I shouldn't be working in a farm-yard now. Long, long ago, I should have been helped and taught to turn my tastes into a trade. Ah! they're fine fellows, those Germans! I wish I was a German with all my heart. And I wish,—oh, I wish Grinfield was at the bottom of the sea! It seems to me every place offers advantages except the one in which my hard fate has cast me. It says here, too, that all over England, in Worcestershire, Lincolnshire, and all the counties round about, there have been Industrial Exhibitions and the like, which have roused the men and boys of the villages to give their leisure hours to carving, painting on wood, drawing, and carpentering, with such good results that many of them have been admitted into the Worcester china works, or sent to carving establishments in London. And here there's nothing of the kind ever known—nothing!"

He had been so excited with his subject that he had not noticed that as he was speaking his mother had once or twice changed color, and that she had slightly averted her face from him.

"Where's the good of reading all that stuff,"

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she said,—but there was a troubled argumentative tone in her voice which it had not had before,—"if it only makes you discontented with your lot? How many a poor lad in London would be thankful to change places with you! A comfortable roof over your head, and an assured independence, as long as you've the will and the strength to work. It's wonderful to me how people can be so ungrateful for their blessings."

Still, she did not speak with the same confident assurance she had evinced at the beginning of the conversation, and as Bill did not answer, she looked anxiously, even nervously, at him. "Bill," she said, "I've lived longer in the world by many years than you, and I've seen many sides of life. Believe me when I tell you a hard-working unambitious life is the safest and the happiest. All the rest is struggle and disappointment. It wears out heart and life, and gives nothing in exchange. Bill, I *know* it. Give up these high-flown ideas, and try and be contented in the path to which it has pleased God to call you."

Bill shook his head.

"The life of a farm-laborer will never make *me* happy, mother. I'd risk all the struggle and dis-

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appointment gladly for the sake of the possible reward. But I'll try and be content for your sake with my present life, till I see a way out of it."

"What do you mean?" said the widow. "Oh, Bill! Bill! you're not going to throw up your place!"

"No, no," he said, soothingly; "don't you be afraid, mother dear. I'm not going to do anything foolish. I'm only going to wait, till, as I say, I see a way out of it."

"If there is a way," said Bessie softly, "God will show it."

There was silence for a minute after this, till the widow burst out again. "Thank God *I've* no talents to make me discontented with my lot! All I ask is for health and strength to earn my bread honestly; and to owe nobody anything."

"You talk, mother," said Bill, reproachfully, "as if talents didn't come from God quite as much as health and strength. Isn't one given by Him to be made use of quite as much as the other? Why should you think it right for me to hide a talent in the earth?"

"Because I've seen the misery it leads to," she exclaimed. "I've seen, and suffered from, the

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misery and ruin that comes from that struggle to make a way in the world, because one fancies one is more gifted than other people. I tell you it's folly from beginning to end!"

She hid her face in her hands.

William and Elizabeth glanced at each other.

They were nearer the mystery that overhung their past than they had ever been yet; and the son, flushed with success, was eager to press on the subject, and gain a complete victory.

But the daughter, woman-like, was filled with pity and compunction for the almost prostrate foe, and signing to her brother to say no more, she rose and declared herself ready to go to bed.

Her mother seconded her readily; and they left the room together. Bill retired to his own little apartment, and, shading the candle that he might not disturb the slumbers of his little brother, set to work at his carving as if he had never left it.

Far into the night he toiled away with his penknife, till, by the might of his firm resolution and indomitable perseverance, he had conquered the difficulty that had baffled him before.

Far into the night the sister knelt by her bedside, praying that He who had given the talent

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would show some way in which it might be turned to account, and not suffer her beloved brother to sink into apathy and discontent.

Far into the night the mother tossed about, restless; murmuring every now and then to herself, "I meant it for the best. I'm sure I've been right to do as I have done. And yet,—and yet."

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CHAPTER V.

THE FAIRY AT THE BIG HOUSE.

THE next morning Bill left home earlier than usual, as he had to take some clean clothes to the Big House before going to his work at the farm.

With his thoughts dwelling on the usual subject, he walked along quickly, the basket on his arm. Arrived at the back-door of the Big House, he was about to deposit his burden and proceed on his way, when the housemaid asked him to wait a minute, as she believed there was a message to go back to Mrs. Tarver.

She further requested him to carry the basket to the foot of the bedroom staircase; and then, pushing open a door in the passage, she said, "If you will wait in the little library, I'll go up and inquire about it; I may be a few minutes, as if the lady's-maid is in Mrs. Herbert's room, I sha'n't be able to speak to her. There's nobody in the library. Missus won't be down for hours."

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Bill assented to her request, and walked into the room.

He found himself in a comfortable little apartment, evidently dedicated entirely to the invalid lady.

There was a couch by the fire, to which was fitted an invalid-table and reading-desk.

There were books, work, drawing-materials, and paint-boxes on different tables in the room; and Bill sighed as he thought what a highly-gifted creature Mrs. Herbert must be, and how fortunate in thus possessing every advantage wherewith to cultivate her tastes.

He looked in vain, however, for any sign of that delicious tool-box which was so often uppermost in his thoughts.

He wandered about the room, looking at the china, the pictures, and other things in the room, till he came upon a little table in the window, on which stood a large wooden box.

When his eyes fell upon this box he started, and clasped his hands together.

His eyes glowed and sparkled, and with a half-uttered exclamation of delight he advanced nearer and nearer, and, bending over it, stood motionless

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For its lid was most beautifully and wonderfully carved: a real work of art.

For full ten minutes he remained as if under a spell, gazing with wonder at the beauty of the detail and the delicacy of the workmanship.

And as he drank it in, his heart swelled with the same feelings, half of pride and half of humility, that drew from another kind of artist the triumphant exclamation, "And I, too, am a painter!"

It is true his heart sank within him at the thought of his own inferiority, and at the recollection of his own poor little attempts at home.

But with all that, arose a proud feeling in his breast that his foot was upon the same ladder, albeit it were the very lowest step, to the top of which the originator of such a conception had climbed; that his face was set towards the same goal that another had so triumphantly reached; and that his own work and the realization of all his dreams that he saw before him, had been accomplished by kindred means.

His mind soared away into fields of infinite possibilities.

"What man has done, man may do," he ex-

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claimed almost aloud, and he drew a long breath of inspiration.

"Why! you're talking to yourself," said a soft, very silvery voice close to him.

Bill started, and turned round. So far away were his thoughts that he had difficulty in remembering where he was, or what had brought him hither, and was so dazed and bewildered that he could not speak.

At first he saw nothing; but he found he had not looked low enough.

Casting his eyes down, they lighted on a tiny creature, with a shower of wild fair hair, from out of which a pair of laughing eyes were gazing in astonishment at him.

Bill, still half dreaming, had difficulty in persuading himself that this was not some diminutive Queen of Art and Beauty come to ask him by what right he had made this encroachment on her dominions.

The trim, upright, little figure, the symmetry of the little black silk legs, the coloring of the garments that harmonized so well with the bright hair, seemed to him, for a moment, only another form of art, only another example of the perfection of

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lines and curves, and harmony of detail, of which his mind was full.

An instant's reflection, however, told him that it was only Mrs. Herbert's little girl.

He knew her well enough by sight; as he had often seen her in church, or passed her in the lanes on her pony, or walking with the nurse; but he had never spoken to her before.

Blushing deeply, he took off his cap, and stammered out an apology.

"What *were* you doing?" laughed the child. "You were staring so at something that you didn't even look round when I came in! And then you began talking to yourself. Do you know I was quite frightened. For one minute I thought you were——" She whispered something, and nodded mysteriously.

"Mad?" smiled Bill.

"Oh, no!" she said, "something *much* worse."

"Worse!" exclaimed Bill.

"Oh, yes!" she said, shaking her head solemnly; "much, much worse. It's such a dreadful thing I don't think I could tell you."

"If it's so bad, miss," said Bill, smiling, "I'm sorry you should have thought it of me."

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"Ah, well: it was only for a minute," she said; "I'm sure you never would be this; now *would* you?"

"But I don't know what it is yet, miss," said Bill.

"Well! come a little nearer, and I'll whisper."

Bill advanced.

"Stoop!" she said.

Bill stooped.

"Lower!" she exclaimed; "you don't seem to get a bit nearer, though I'm standing on tip-toe. You are so very, very tall."

Bill bent lower and lower, but still to no purpose.

"Perhaps you'd better kneel," she said at last; "and then I shall just about reach your ear."

Bill obeyed; and raising herself on the very tips of her toes, the child said in an awe-struck whisper:

"Tipsy!"

Bill stood up, and laughed.

"No, miss; you need not be afraid of that. I seldom touch anything but water."

"I'm *so* glad," she said, drawing a long breath of relief; "I'm so dreadfully afraid of tipsy men. I often meet them in the lanes late in the after-

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noon, when I'm riding on my pony: or I see them outside the door of the public-house in the village; and it *does* frighten me so! I dream of them at night afterwards," she added, with a little shudder, "reeling about, and tumbling down: and it is so dreadful. Do you ever dream that a drunken man is reeling after you, and that your feet are tied to the ground, and you can't get away?"

Bill's memory was not able to furnish him with the recollection of any such painful experience.

"Ah, well, you're very lucky then; for it's a most horrible dream. But perhaps," she went on, looking up at him inquiringly, "you're like our coachman?"

"Like your coachman?" repeated Bill.

"Yes. I mean, perhaps you're not afraid of tipsy men. *He* isn't a bit, you know. He never can *think* why I want to gallop off when I see one coming along."

"I'm not afraid of them, miss," Bill answered, "but I hate meeting them quite as much as you do. To see a man making himself like an animal is a dreadful sight, I think."

"You think a tipsy man looks like an animal, then," she said, as if struck by the idea.

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"Indeed I do," he answered, sadly.

"What kind of animal," she questioned, "should you say a man looked most like when he's——?" she nodded again in a mysterious way, as if she did not like saying the word.

"I hardly know," he answered, while his brow darkened.

"A pig?" she suggested, putting her hands behind her, and looking up in his face.

"Yes, or an *ass*," he said; but he was speaking more to himself than to her.

"You're getting quite angry about it, ain't you?" she said.

"It makes me angry," he answered, forgetting he was speaking to a child, "to see men wasting their time, and going to the public-house, just because they've got nothing else to do in their leisure hours."

"Is *that* why they do it?" she said.

"Of course it is," he answered, warming with his subject, as his grievances about Grinfield recurred to him; "there's nothing for a man to do in this wretched little village *but* go to the public-house. Why, I should think," he went on, making a bold plunge into statistics, "there's more drunk-

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enness in this village of Grinfield than in almost any other place!"

The child's face lengthened considerably.

"In proportion, you know," Bill added.

"In Proportion," she repeated; "where's that? Is it the name of this county?"

"No," said Bill, smiling; "this county is Yorkshire. Don't you know that?"

"I don't know my counties well," she said, rather shyly. "I am not very far on in geography. You see mammy's too ill to teach me much, and, besides, I hate lessons."

"You ought to go to the infant-school, and hear my sister teaching the little children there," said Bill; "they like their lessons, and they do lots of geography."

"Would they know where Proportion is?" she asked, timidly.

Bill smiled. "Proportion's not a place, miss: it's a word."

"What does it mean?" was the next question.

Bill looked down from his five-foot-eleven elevation, to the tiny creature below, who hardly reached his hand, and felt the impossibility of an explanation.

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"I'm afraid I couldn't tell you, miss."

"Is it such a *very* bad word?" she inquired, looking very solemn.

"No," laughed Bill; "it's only difficult for such a little lady as you to understand."

"I see you think me a dunce," she said, half-pathetically, half-peevishly, "and much more stupider than the children at the infant-school. You want me to go and see how much more they know than I do. It's very unkind of you!"

Bill was unaware how seldom the petted child was contradicted, or in any way found fault with; and was surprised at her sudden change of tone.

"Oh, dear me! no, miss; I didn't mean that at all. I only thought it would amuse you to hear them doing their lessons. That's all."

"Ah, well," she said, mollified in a moment, "it's just what would amuse me very much, but mammy never will let me go. She always says 'you'll catch something' whenever I want to go *anywhere*. It is so tiresome."

"There's nothing to catch just now," said Bill. "My sister always knows if any of the children are ill; but there's been no illness at all this winter. You might go there quite safely."

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"Isn't it funny?" said the child, in an aggrieved voice; "mammy's *always* expecting me to be ill, and yet I never *am* ill! I do wish," with a deep-drawn sigh, "she'd give up expecting it."

"You can't wonder she should be nervous about you, miss," said Bill, gravely, "when she's lost so many children."

"They weren't *lost*," exclaimed the child; "they died. They got ill, and then worse and worse, and then they died. They're all dead but me."

"I don't suppose you remember them, miss?"

"Oh, no! Sometimes I don't believe I ever *had* any brothers and sisters. All I know about them is their little graves in the churchyard. I go and sit there sometimes for fun—oh, no!" she broke off, noticing Bill's shocked expression, "I don't mean fun exactly; but to amuse myself. At least —well! I go there," she said, in a plaintive voice, "when I'm all alone, and have got nothing to do; when mammy's too ill to have me, and I'm *so* dull all alone, don't you see?"

Bill assented hurriedly, afraid she was going to cry.

"But I shall come to the infant-school now instead, the very next time I'm dull," she proclaimed.

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"I thought you said Mrs. Herbert would not let you," said Bill, a little nervously.

"Why, you've just asked me to come!" she retorted. "Didn't you say yourself I ought to hear your sister teaching the children, and that you knew they had got nothing I could catch! I shall tell mammy you said I might."

Bill felt very uncomfortable, and wondered what he had better say. But before he had made up his mind, she began again:

"Well! now go on with what we were talking of before."

"I said," returned Bill, glad to change the subject, "that I believed there was more drunkenness in this little village of Grinfield than in almost any other place, in propor—in England."

"And is that really true!" she exclaimed, looking horrified.

"I'm afraid so," said Bill, sadly.

"If *I* were the Queen of England," said the child, stamping her little foot upon the ground, "I wouldn't have any public-houses anywhere. I'd burn them all, and not allow any new ones to be built up. Then nobody could go to them, and get tipsy."

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"It would be no use," replied Bill, regardless of the youth of his auditor, now that he was fairly launched on his favorite topic; "if a man will drink, he will. If there were no public-houses to go to, he'd get the beer or the spirits, or whatever it is, some other way, and drink it at home, or by the roadside, or anywhere. It would come to the same thing in the end. *That's* not what's wanted. Men ought to learn to use a thing, without abusing it. It ought not to be necessary to treat them like children, to take a thing altogether away, because they make a bad use of it. We don't want to have a temptation removed, but to learn to resist it. It only wants a little strength and courage. Besides, it's not always the love of drink that takes men to the public-house. As often as not, it's the want of something else to do. It's that that drives our Grinfield men there. And there's more excuse for them than there is for most. Grinfield's not like other places, where there's occupation and amusement provided for a working-man in his leisure hours. Here, no one takes the trouble to do anything for him. There are no book clubs or lending libraries to give him a chance of improving his mind, no night schools, no penny readings,

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nothing! There's not even recreation and amusement. Not a flower show to encourage him to cultivate his garden, or a cricket-club, or anything of the kind. Not a single inducement is offered him to prevent his hanging about the public-house all day, when he's not at work. There's nothing on earth for him to do else. And it's a crying shame, that's what it is!"

"Are you scolding me?" interrupted the child; "you do seem so very angry!"

Bill stopped short.

The little creature was gazing at him, bewildered and frightened. She had striven to follow him at first, for there was a fascination in being talked to as a grown-up person; but he had got far beyond her; and had only created a vague feeling in her little mind that somebody had done something very wrong, and that some others had omitted to do something which it was clear they ought to do.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said Bill; "I was only wishing to explain to you that it is not altogether the men's fault that there's so much drunkenness here; but that some of the blame lies with those who do nothing to better the working-man's

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condition." He had forgotten that he was speaking to Mrs. Herbert's daughter, and that his implied reproach was addressed to the child of the only wealthy resident in the place. But it flashed across him now, as he looked at the little lady before him, and he began to fear that some kind of light was beginning to dawn in her small mind too.

For she still stood silent, looking very puzzled.

Not that there was anything of fear of consequences in the young man's breast; but that in his deeply-rooted love and respect for his own mother, he would not for worlds bring a doubt across the little girl's mind about hers; or shake that faith in a mother's goodness which is the birthright of every little child.

She showed a pertinacious desire to pursue the subject, which troubled him not a little.

"Who are these naughty people?" she said, eyeing Bill doubtfully; "what are their names?"

"There *is* nobody exactly to do anything," was his evasive answer. "Old Mr. Powell, the parson, is too old, and the rest mostly too poor. And——" he added, hurriedly, "Mrs. Herbert's too ill,——and you are too young. But," he

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went on more boldly, "you'll be older some day, miss, and when you're a grown-up young lady, you'll do a great deal, I dare say."

He had succeeded, at any rate, in distracting her thoughts; for a delighted smile broke over her face at the idea of being grown-up.

"I'm going to be eight on Midsummer Day!" she said; "so in ten years I shall be going to be eighteen. That's quite grown-up, isn't it?"

"Quite!" he answered; "it's a little older than I am now."

The child measured his height with her eye as he stood before her, with proud satisfaction, and sighed with pleasure at the thought.

"A *trailing* gown!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands; "no lessons, and hair done up like mammy's!"

Child-like, she had forgotten the present in the future, and was lost in a dream of delight.

And youth, which is only one step beyond childhood, made the young man do likewise; and his thoughts had wandered on to all that those ten years might bring: to all that he might by that time have accomplished.

For a few minutes neither spoke.

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The volatile child was the first to tire of meditation; and she tried to recur to the conversation.

Her little mind, however, could not pick it up again from the starting-point she desired, and she got back to the old subject.

"So you drink nothing but water?" she said, looking at him admiringly; "no more do I."

"I drink beer sometimes," he answered; "a proper quantity is good and necessary for a man who works hard. But I don't care about it much. My mother would be glad if I drank a little more; she doesn't care to see me drink so much water."

"I suppose," said the child, meditatively, "there's so much water wanted in your house, that she'd almost *rather* you drank beer."

Then seeing Bill looked puzzled, she added,—

"I was thinking of the washing, you know."

Bill smiled. "Oh! there's enough, and to spare. She thinks I should get stronger on beer, that's all."

A deep sigh of intense interest, and then she said, "But all this time you've never told me what you were looking at when I came in. Why, you never even looked round at me!"

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"I was looking at that box," he answered; "can you tell me anything about it?"

"No," she said, "except that I'm very fond of looking at it too."

Bill started; could this tiny child be a kindred spirit?

"You like looking at it," he exclaimed, eagerly; "do you carve?"

"Yes, a little; but not so well as Mrs. Hitchin. *She* carves beautifully."

"And who is Mrs. Hitchin?"

"She's mammy's maid," answered the little girl.

"And what does she carve?" inquired Bill.

"Chickens," the child answered, "or rabbits, or whatever mammy has for her dinner. I can only carve just a very little: a tiny slice off the breast, you know, or something like that. When it comes to a leg, or a wing, I have to give it up to Hitchin. But!——you don't seem to be listening to me a bit!"

Bill sighed, and tried to shake off the feeling of disappointment that had come over him.

"Mrs. Herbert carves though, I am sure," he said, with a sudden recollection of the box he had seen.

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"Oh, poor mammy!" exclaimed the child, "her wrist's not even as strong as mine. She can't even carve a *boiled* chicken, which you know comes to pieces with a spoon. The only things *she* can carve," she added, in a tone of lofty disdain, "is a little photograph-frame, or a paper-knife, or something of that sort. You're listening much more than you were just now."

"Hasn't she got a most beautiful box of tools?" asked Bill, stepping forward in his excitement.

"Yes! She's got a new one just come down from London; but she's never used it yet. She's been busy over some new kind of work lately. She doesn't often do the same thing two days running. She gets so tired of everything."

Bill turned away. The idea of the wasted advantages for which he was craving made him feel bitter.

"What's the good of being rich?" he muttered; "what's the good of having advantages? Oh, what waste! what waste!"

The child's merry voice recalled him to himself.

"The inside of the carved box is much prettier than the out!" she laughed, nodding her head.

"Is it really?" exclaimed Bill.

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"Yes!" she said, and there was a merry twinkle in her eye; "would you like to see it?"

As she spoke, she advanced on tip-toe towards the table, and put one little hand upon the box, while with the other she beckoned to him to follow her.

His first feeling about her returned as he watched her.

She looked so fairy-like as she stood there, and so much in harmony with the beautiful work of art on which her hand was laid.

Again she seemed to him some small queen of art and fancy, of genius and imagination.

And now she was about to unlock a mysterious casket, and reveal to a mortal's wondering eyes the treasures of beauty concealed within!

"Shut your eyes!" she said, imperiously, "and don't open them till I've said 'Jig!'"

Bill obeyed, and waited patiently for the expected signal.

"Snip!" said the sprite in a high treble.

"Snap!
Snorum!
Hey-cockalorum!
Jig!"

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Bill opened his eyes eagerly, and searched for the rare beauty he expected.

He saw nothing but some French bonbons.

"Is that all?" he exclaimed, in the bitterness of his disappointment.

"Oh, dear, no!" the fairy answered, with her back turned, and her mouth already full, "there's another tray underneath quite full. Why! how greedy you are to want such a lot! Wasn't it a nice surprise? Take one. What do you like? Coffee-caramels, or chocolate with cream?"

Then looking round at him in surprise at his silence, she added, "I'm allowed, you know, so you needn't look so *ser'ous*."

"Thank you, miss," said Bill, gravely; "perhaps you'll choose for me."

A great hunt, and a good deal of indecision ensued: but in a few minutes a beautiful rose-colored bonbon was produced: and Bill was desired to "pop it quick into his mouth, and not *on any account* to nibble it first, as it was full of stuff that would gush out."

"Isn't it good?" she said, gleefully, as she watched him. "I think I'll eat one like it myself."

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Another hunt, and not quite such a successful one, for she contrived to smash the bonbon with her arm; and the "stuff" ran out all over her cuff.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, "what a mess!"

"Mother will wash it out," said Bill, smiling.

"So she will!" she answered, delighted; "and ——oh, dear me! I quite forgot! Hitchin sent me down to you with a message, and I've never given it yet!"

"Why, that's the message I've been waiting for all this time," said Bill; "and I ought to have gone off to my work some time ago."

"I'm very sorry," she said; "I'll give it to you now. It was to say there wasn't *quite* enough starch in my cuffs this week. They're rather limp, you know. Feel them."

"I see," said Bill, "and I'll tell my mother. And now I must wish you good-morning, miss, for that was all I was waiting for."

It struck him that perhaps Mrs. Herbert would not be altogether pleased to find her daughter chatting familiarly to a plow-boy; and he did not wish to take advantage of the child's ignorance.

So he made for the door.

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"You haven't said good-by," she said, holding out her little hand.

But Bill did not take it. He bowed and passed on.

"Why won't you take my hand?" she said, still holding it out.

Bill hesitated.

"Is it because it's so sticky?" she inquired. "Well, it's only sugar, you know. It's not as if it was *real* dirt. But I'll soon wipe it off."

And suiting the action to the word, she rubbed it two or three times on her frock, and then held it out again, saying, "There! Now it's clean!"

This time Bill felt he could not refuse; and as he met the candid unconscious eyes, he felt it equally impossible to explain why he had refused it before.

"You're very, *very* partic'lar, *ain't* you?" she said, as he silently took her little hand in his.

And Bill did not contradict her, or vindicate himself at all: for his thoughts had strayed from the child once more.

His eyes had wandered from the uplifted face in which a painter would have delighted, and were riveted again on the antique box.

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Slowly he drank it in.

Moment by moment it became more familiar to him, bit by bit it sank into his mind.

All unknown to him, it stamped itself upon his brain with an impress that nothing hereafter would altogether efface!

To his credit, however, be it spoken, that though to the last, as he left the room, his hungry eye rested on it, he *did*, ere he closed the door, take one farewell look at the fairy form, which, with all its hopeless alliance to the trivial, the frivolous, and the commonplace, must yet always be associated in his mind with his first glimpse of real art.

For eyes should not be dead to the beauty of nature, that are so alive to the beauty of art.

And the child made such a pretty picture, standing there, watching him go.

Her great eyes looked so puzzled and wistful, peeping out from her wild fair hair.

The indifference he manifested was so strange and so novel to the petted only child.

It troubled her light spirit for a moment, and she turned towards the window with a sigh.

Putting her little elbows on the table, and rest-

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ing her chin upon her hands, she gazed thoughtfully down upon the bonbons.

"I suppose," she said, after a minute or two, as she helped herself to a chocolate-cream, taking care this time not to soil her cuff in diving into the recesses of the box,—"I suppose it's being accustomed to see so *much* washing, and so *many* clean clothes, that makes him so very, *very* particular."

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CHAPTER VI.

THE LETTER FROM BOURNBY.

DINNER was getting ready at the little cottage: but Bill had not returned. Bessie and Charlie had come home from the schools for good, as it was the Saturday half-holiday; and the widow was busily ironing a few clothes that yet remained to be sent up to the Big House.

"The postman!" said Charlie, jumping up from his game with the cat, and running to the door; "a letter for you, mother, and the post-mark is Bournby."

"Ah, well, give it to Bessie," said the widow; "she must read it to me, for I haven't time to stop. It's a long time now since I've had any news of my brother, and I should like to hear what he's got to say."

"Charlie must go and get some wood for the fire, then," said Bessie; "I was just going to fetch some from the stack."

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Charlie ran off, and Bessie opened the letter and began to read:

"'My dear sister.

"'This comes hoping you and yours are quite well, as it leaves us at present.'"

"Bless his old heart!" put in the widow; "as kind and faithful a brother as ever lived. Go on, Bess."

"'I write to say there's to be grand doings in these parts, and I've been thinking as how your young folks might like to have a hand in it. So I send you the printed paper, and you'll please return it when done with.'"

(Here a piece of paper fluttered to the ground, but Bessie was too excited to notice it.)

Her quick eye, traveling on as she read, took in what was coming before she arrived at it, and her face was beginning to flush, and her voice was getting unsteady.

"What ever's the matter, child?" inquired her mother, looking round.

"Oh! mother, just listen!" said the girl. "Oh! doesn't it seem wonderful after our talk last night? Didn't I say God would show Bill a way, if he only waited for it?"

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"Why don't you read the letter instead of talking?" said her mother, sharply. Dim suspicions were beginning to creep over her, and her growing irritation betrayed itself in her tone.

Bessie went on eagerly: "'This grand affair is coming off in April, and it's what's called an Industrial Exhibition.'"

Bessie dropped the letter, and looked up with sparkling eyes: "Oh, mother! mother! doesn't it seem almost like a miracle?"

But the widow ironed away in ominous silence.

Bessie waited and waited for an answer, but none came.

She had been so overwhelmed with joy for Bill's sake, that she had forgotten her mother might take another view of the subject: but now she began to feel a little uneasy. She contrived to take a sidelong view of her mother's face, and saw she had been right in her surmise. The face expressed nothing but unqualified disapproval, mingled with an expression of resolution that Bessie did not like to see.

She got up, and went nearer to her.

"You don't like this, mother?"

"Am I likely to like it?" said the widow, angrily.

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"Don't I know what it means? Unsettling Bill more than he's unsettled already, by putting fresh ideas into his head. It's all very well for your uncle's boys, who'll just employ their leisure hours by it, and be none the less ready for their work. But I know well the effect it'll have upon Bill, and I'm determined he shall know nothing about it. Give me the letter!"

"What are you going to do with it, mother?" inquired Bessie, anxiously. "I haven't read the half of it yet."

"Give me the letter," repeated the widow, holding out her hand.

"Won't you let me read it to you first?" said Bessie, involuntarily clasping it tighter. "There's a lot more coming, about how one is to set about working, and what uncle's boys and girls are going to do. Let me read the rest, mother."

"Give it to me, I say!" exclaimed her mother, angrily; "is it your letter, or is it mine?"

Then, as the girl still seemed to hesitate, she snatched it from her detaining hand; and, without glancing at the contents, she crossed the room with three strides, and flung envelope, letter, and all into the fire!

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Bessie started forward, as if to try and save it from the flames; but it was twisted into tinder in an instant.

"Mother! mother!" she exclaimed in despair, "oh, what have you done! How could you—how could you? oh! what will Bill say!"

"I've done what I think right," the widow answered, gloomily; "and as Bill will never be any the wiser, he'll have nothing to say. For he'll never hear anything of it from me, and I won't have you say a word about it either."

Bessie looked up, bewildered, and as if she thought she could not have heard right. "*What* did you say, mother?" she said, in a low voice, as she strove to keep down the tumult of indignation she felt rising in her breast; "that I am not to tell Bill—*Bill*, anything about it?"

"Yes," said her mother, "that's what I said, and that's what I mean. I forbid you even to tell him I've had a letter from Bournby—do you hear?"

A torrent of words rushed to Bessie's lips, but she forced them back, and answered, in the same low tone, "I'm not sure I ought to obey you, mother; so I don't know that I can promise that."

"And I say that you *must* promise it, and

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quickly too," said the widow, hotly; "for Bill will be here in a moment. What can a girl like you know about it? I tell you I have my reasons, and I *know* I'm right in what I'm doing. If I could explain them to you, you'd think with me directly. There's Bill coming now! Promise, Bessie! Quick! Promise!"

She laid her hand on the girl's arm eagerly; and Bessie was frightened to feel how it trembled, and at the violent agitation working in her mother's face.

Feelings, half of fear and half of compassion, came over her again as they had done the night before, and she felt resistance to be cruel and impossible.

"I promise," she said, sadly; and then she escaped from the room, to hide the tears she could no longer repress.

Bill had come home in good spirits. The halo of inspiration which had encircled him since his eyes lighted on the carved box had not yet faded, and he seemed to hold his head more erect, and to have a light in his eye which had not been there when he left home in the morning.

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He looked happy, and was quite disposed to talk at dinner, and to be communicative about his visit to the Big House.

That is, as far as the child was concerned. He did not mention the box. He wished to keep as far as possible from all dangerous topics; for he had the memory of last night's conversation fresh in his mind, and he did not wish to distress his mother again.

The washerwoman was quite as ready as her son to keep up a conversation; for as the meal went on, she got a little uneasy at Bessie's non-appearance, and did not wish him to notice it.

She was also rather fearful lest the girl should appear with a tear-stained countenance; and that Bill should begin to ask questions.

She was growing a little bit afraid of her children.

They were making such rapid advances into manhood and womanhood, and had several times lately shown a disposition to take their lives into their own hands.

If they banded together against her in this matter of the letter from Bournby, what was she to do?

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To be sure she had implicit faith in Bessie's obedience, and in her given promise: but she dreaded her son's questioning, and his resolution to come to the bottom of the affair; if his sister's appearance should make him suspicious, or if her protracted absence from the dinner-table should attract his attention.

"That's a funny little girl of Mrs. Herbert's," said Bill.

Here Bessie slipped quietly in, and took her place without meeting her brother's eye, though he looked up and smiled at her entrance.

The washerwoman glanced nervously at her; but her fears were allayed by seeing that, though she looked pale and sad, all traces of crying had passed away.

Still, all was not safe yet; for Bill was looking hard at Bessie, as if wondering why she did not return his smile of greeting: so the widow went on hurriedly,—

"Yes: she's a funny little girl, is little Miss Herbert, and as spoilt as spoilt can be. She's never been contradicted in her life, I believe, or refused anything she wished for. She's the only one Mrs. Herbert has reared, you see. The rest

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all died one after the other, before they could run alone. But how came you to see her, Bill? It's never happened before when you've been up to the house with the clothes, has it?"

"Well, no," said Bill; "I generally wait in the kitchen; but to-day the child was sent down with the message instead of the maid; and she stayed chatting on, and forgot to give it me."

"Where were you waiting?" asked his mother; "did the child come into the kitchen?"

"No," Bill answered; "they put me into a room they called the little library."

He was getting abstracted; for the thought of the child was bringing back to him the box with which she was so inseparably connected; and he hardly heard now what his mother was saying.

"The child likes her own way, and has always had it; but for all that, the servants say she's too good to be spoilt, though she's as wild as a bird."

But Bill's interest was gone; he had relapsed into silence and dreaminess. However, the danger was past, so the widow did not try to keep up the conversation. For the meal was over, and Bessie was beginning to clear away the things.

Bill rose after a time, and said he must be off to

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the farm. As he left the cottage, he turned round and asked Bessie to be at the milestone in the village about four, to meet him on his return from his work.

"As you are going to shop there," he said, "we may as well meet, and walk home together."

Bessie assented, but not with her usual alacrity.

The truth was, she would have given anything to escape a *tête-à-tête* walk with her brother that afternoon.

Poor girl! her accustomed pleasure was turned into pain by what had occurred.

She quite dreaded being alone with Bill; and besides, she had read in his eyes that he had something particular to tell her. How could she be the recipient of his hopes and fears, with the strain of her promise upon her?

How could she talk and sympathize as usual when *she* knew, what he did not, that the eagerly-desired hand had at last been held out to help him; and that she was privy to its being flung aside?

She sighed heavily as she cleared away the dinner-things, and tidied up the room. She was quite alone, for the widow, who perhaps shrank a

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little from being with her daughter with no third person present, had retired into the wash-house; and Charlie was playing in the garden.

All of a sudden, Bessie's eye fell upon a printed paper lying on the ground at her feet; and she picked it up with a start.

For it flashed across her in an instant what it must be; and hope suddenly revived in her breast. She unfolded it eagerly, and read in large letters at the top,—

Bournby Industrial Exhibition.

She was not mistaken, then! It *was* the inclosure of which her uncle's letter had spoken, and which must have fallen out without her perceiving it. Too excited to realize anything but that all chance for Bill was not yet over, she spread it out, and read it eagerly.

"*To the Working Men and Women, Boys and Girls, of Bournby, and other Villages.*

"*It is proposed to have an Industrial Exhibition at Bournby on April 7.*

"*No one has any idea what they can do until they*

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try: and no doubt you will all find you can do a great deal more than you have any idea of. The Committee of the 'Bournby Industrial Exhibition' wants to set you all to work in your own homes, in a pleasant way; and for you to gain something by it.

"Our winter evenings, and leisure hours in the day, often hang heavy on our hands: and here is an opportunity of filling them up pleasantly, and making them fly quickly.

"Prizes will be given for the best among the articles produced; and the articles themselves sold."

Bessie read and re-read the paper. Her cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkled; while on her lips the question trembled, "Shall I give it to Bill?"

It was a terrible temptation.

Conflicting feelings chased each other through her brain.

How was she to tell it was right to let him lose this golden opportunity?

How did she know she ought to take upon herself the responsibility of blighting his life in this way?

Was she to be the arbitrator of her brother's fate?

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Was she not sacrificing him to a weak fear of her own: because she hated to agitate and distress her mother?

She must weigh these questions carefully in her own mind; and give each their proper balance.

But, no! she had had a command laid upon her; and she had promised.

It was, alas! no longer a question of due weight and just balance, but a question of her word given, her obedience pledged.

She felt such a traitor to *him* on the one hand, to her mother on the other: whichever way she looked at the subject, she felt as if she wronged some one.

Could she not compromise matters?

Supposing, for argument's sake, she handed Bill the paper without speaking. Her mother's words had only been, "I forbid you to tell him anything about it: even that I have had a letter from Bournby."

It was to that command that she had answered "I promise."

"Well! by this means she did not disobey the command, and at the same time she saved her brother.

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Or she might put the paper in his room, and leave him to find it there: thus easing her conscience by having nothing personally, as it were, to do with the affair.

Bill was old enough to judge for himself in these matters. Surely her mother was stretching her authority beyond its limits in thus hiding from a son in early manhood what was so much to his advantage.

She got so far as her brother's little room; and then paused.

Obedience to the letter might be hers, but how about the spirit of her mother's command?

She saw suddenly the miserable sophistry of her argument, and felt she was acting wrongly.

No! it must not be!

She must think of something else.

But now that she was surrounded by Bill's carving, the proofs of the rare talent she so firmly believed in, she grew indignant at being bound to thwart him in this way.

Why should her mother set her face so against it?

What was this secret in the past forever starting up to mar her brother's prospects?

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She would go to her at once, and demand an explanation. She had been weak last night to interrupt her brother when they were so nearly discovering what the mystery was: but she would be weak no longer.

She would force her mother to explain all, and then when Bill came home, tell him what it was that forever stood in his way, and let him judge for himself in future. She had a power over her mother now. She was not, as hitherto, impotent to wrest her secret from her. She would confront her with this paper, and tell her she would conceal it but on that one condition.

If she refused!—then she would tell her plainly that her intention was to cancel the promise wrung from her at a disadvantage; and Bill should learn the chance that was offered to him, and himself decide whether it was to be thrown away.

But it was only for a moment that the girl allowed her feelings thus to get the better of her.

She was smarting under Bill's wrongs, and was transformed into a Nemesis for his sake.

But soon her own right feeling and the memory of her mother chased these hard thoughts away.

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That poor hard-worked mother, who had toiled for them all her life!

No. She could not do it.

There must be no threats; no menaces; she must not forget her duty: she must not be wanting in filial reverence, nor lose her own self-respect.

"If there is a way," she said, half-aloud, "God will show it."

Had it not been her prayer last night?

"But how do I know," she argued, "that this opportunity is not the answer He has sent? How do I know that this is not the way He means to show me? May I not be willfully closing my eyes to what God means me to see?"

Oh! this struggle between conflicting paths of duty!

Oh! this uncertainty as to what is right and what is wrong!

What ought she, what ought she, to do!

When wrong looked at one moment like right, and again right had at the next the appearance of wrong, how was she, how was she, to distinguish!

Oh! for the old days when a Voice was heard plainly saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it:"

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when Abraham and Jacob and Moses and Job "talked with the Lord face to face, as a man talketh with his friend."

Oh! for the times when the line was drawn, marked and clear, between "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not."

There was no mistaking then; no groping like this in darkness, uncertain and bewildered——

She fell on her knees, and prayed for light and guidance.

She grew calmer, quieter, more able to judge and to discriminate.

Clear and unanswerable were the words,—

"We may not do evil that good may come."

That was enough. She must simply act up to them, and leave the rest to God.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord, and trust in Him: and He shall bring it to pass . . . Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil . . . Rest in the Lord, and wait . . . "

It had been a hard battle; but she rose from her knees—victorious.

"Mother," she said, going into the kitchen and putting down the paper on the table, "this fell out of Uncle Ned's letter without my noticing it; and

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I found it lying on the floor. He said he should like it back when you had done with it."

Her voice, albeit it was very low and sad, did not shake or falter, and she left the kitchen as quietly as she had entered it.

But when she reached her own room, she fell upon her knees with a burst of bitter weeping.

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PART II.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BURDEN OF A DOUBLE SECRET.

It was nearly three o'clock when Bessie and Charlie started for their shopping in the village.

The girl looked very pale, and there was a sad look in her eyes; but her face bore no other signs of her late conflict.

She had done all she could to remove any traces of it, for fear either of her brothers should be suspicious; and she exerted herself to talk cheerfully to Charlie as they walked along, in order that his attention should not be drawn to her in any way.

It took her some little time to make all her purchases in the village, so that it was past four o'clock before she turned her steps towards the milestone where Bill had appointed her to meet him.

Her heart was beginning to sink again at the

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thought of the coming interview. She dreaded so to find herself alone with him, as usual: and she kept Charlie close by her side, because his presence generally prevented their conversation taking a confidential tone; and she had a cowardly wish to put off the evil moment as long as possible.

Bill had looked so happy at dinner that day, that she was quite sure he had something pleasant to tell her connected with his carving; and how to meet his eager eye with her accustomed sympathy and interest she did not know.

But when she saw Bill coming along, all thoughts of herself, or of her secret, went out of her head.

Something had happened since the morning, she felt quite sure. He no longer looked the same. He walked along slowly and unwillingly, as if he also were putting off the meeting to the latest possible moment.

The happy look had gone out of his face, and it was a shade paler than usual.

He cast a bored, impatient look at Charlie as he came up; and Bessie saw in a moment he wanted to get rid of the little boy, that he might speak to her alone.

Frightened at his appearance, and eager to learn

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what had happened, she gave Charlie the parcels, and told him to run home with them as quick as possible.

Bill watched his little brother till he was out of hearing; and then turning round to Bessie, he said, abruptly, "Bess, I've lost my place!"

"*What!*" cried the girl.

"I've lost my place at the farm," he repeated; "I'm discharged!"

Bessie felt as if all the world were tumbling about her head, and could not collect her thoughts for a minute.

In her quiet, monotonous life, the smallest change was an event; and now everything seemed to be happening at once.

She felt as if she had lived years since she got up that morning; and as if all the cares of life had come upon her in one short day.

Bill's announcement was so sudden—so startling.

The discharge of which he spoke so quietly was such a calamity, and one so totally unlooked for. It meant such ruin, and such poverty, for them all.

Without Bill's wages, which formed such a large part of the family income, what were they to do?

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Other thoughts, more closely connected with her own affairs, shot for a moment through her brain; but she was too unselfish to dwell upon them. Her chief regret was for the others.

"Oh, Bill! Bill! what are we to do? What is to become of us?"

"I don't know. I can't look forward. I've hardly realized it yet. It has been so sudden, and I've been so taken by surprise."

"Mother!" she gasped; "oh, what will mother say!"

"I'm not going to tell her just yet. I want time to collect my thoughts before I can talk it over with her. I shall let her have Sunday in peace, for of course on Monday she must know. By that time I may have seen some way out of this new trouble; but just now——"

"How was it, Bill? How came the farmer to discharge you in this sudden way?"

"It's not altogether so sudden as you think. I've known for some time that he's been discontented with me, though I didn't expect anything of this kind. You see I can't get through the work the rest can. But what's brought matters to a crisis is that a nephew of his, who happened to

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come on a visit, has asked him for my place; and as he is a fellow with twice my strength, the farmer is very glad to kill two birds with one stone, by obliging his nephew, and getting a better workman. I don't blame him myself. He's behaved very handsomely to me, and has paid me my wages in advance instead of giving me warning, because he wants his nephew to begin at once. So we sha'n't starve just yet. You wouldn't wonder at the farmer's choice, Bess, if you saw this great strapping fellow! Why, my arm by *his*," he concluded, laughing, "looks like a lucifer match!"

"I'm glad you can laugh, Bill," said Bessie, mournfully.

"Well, it *is* odd, I own; but somehow, after the first shock of surprise, I'm not so down as I thought I was. I can't think why I'm not more distressed about it. I shall be, I know, by-and-by, when it comes to breaking it to mother. I think perhaps it is that I feel more *free* than I did. I couldn't have thrown up my means of living, but as my means of living have thrown me up, it seems easier, somehow, to start on my own line of life than it did before."

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"But *how?*" said Bessie, bitterly; "what better prospects have you of getting a start now than you had yesterday?"

"No, that's true," said Bill, thoughtfully, and more dejectedly than he had hitherto spoken.

Poor Bessie spoke bitterly; for she could not dwell calmly on the future that lay before them, on the privations and the poverty in store; but more than all, her heart smote her, as she thought of that chance of a start in life for Bill, that had that very day been held out; that wasted opportunity which might be, which *was*, of the utmost importance now.

How gladly would she have held out to her brother that little bit of consolation, that hope which she *knew* would more than make up to him for the loss he had just sustained.

"Surely, surely," she reflected, "mother will change her mind about it now. Surely she will relent when she learns what has happened. It is Bill's last chance."

But here a sudden thought struck her with dismay.

If Bill did not tell his mother about it till Monday, might it not be too late?

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Might not the letter to her uncle be written, refusing his offer?

Of course it would be so!

Sunday was her mother's only day for writing a letter; and by Monday it would be posted and gone!

Here was indeed a new dilemma. What must she do?

She must try and turn Bill from his purpose. She must try and persuade him not to keep his mother in ignorance; but to tell her at once of his discharge.

But how do so without making him suspicious?

Would he not at once ask her why?

And then what was she to say? Before she had come to any conclusion, Bill's voice broke in upon her meditation.

"I say, Bess, what *are* you thinking about so deeply? I want you to talk it all over with me, and you don't say a word."

There was no time for reflection. Answer she must; and she dashed at once into the subject.

"I was thinking, Bill, that it would be better to tell mother about it at once."

"Oh' no!" he answered; "I couldn't do that. I must have a little time for preparation."

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"Indeed, Bill," she said earnestly, "it would be the best way."

But Bill was firm.

"You know what mother is, Bessie. Her lamentations and reproaches would bewilder and weaken me. I must have some course of action settled, so as to hold out consolation to her with one hand, after having dealt her such a blow with the other. Don't you see?"

"Yes, Bill;" and now Bessie's heart began to beat so violently that her agitation betrayed itself in her voice; "but still if you will only trust me, and tell her to-day, I think it will be better for us all."

Attracted by something in her tone, Bill turned round upon her, and tried to look into her averted face.

"Bess, why are you so odd and determined about it? What in the world is the matter?" he added, quickly, as he saw the agitation working on her features.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," she said, alarmed; only eager now to change the subject, seeing that she should not be able to shake his resolution. "What made you look so happy at dinner to-day, Bill?"

Bill's attention was instantly diverted, and he

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launched into a glowing description of the beautiful work of art he had seen at the Big House.

"It haunts me, Bess!" he concluded. "I see it wherever I look, and I am going to try and do it from recollection directly I get home."

Bessie listened to him with a sinking heart. More and more bitterly did her thoughts dwell upon the chance for Bill that had that day been offered and rejected.

Bill put down her apathy and unusual depression to the shock of the news of his discharge, and did not bother her with any questions.

Arrived at home, he kissed her kindly, bidding her not distress herself about it overmuch.

"Hope on, hope ever," he said; "something will turn up."

He disappeared at once into his little den, from whence he did not emerge till supper-time.

In his engrossing occupation he lost sight of his trouble, and he went to bed happy in the mere thought of his work; while his poor sister, with no such consolation to raise her drooping spirits, sought her couch with a heavy heart, weighed down by the burden of the double secret which had been laid upon her that day.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

THE next day was Sunday, and the Tarver family attended morning service as usual.

After dinner Bill went out for a stroll; and Bessie established herself by the fire with a book. Charlie got out his Bible, and began to prepare his lesson for the Sunday-school, which took place in the afternoon.

Bessie watched her mother's movements anxiously, for she was dreadfully afraid she was going to write a letter.

Too true!

Mrs. Tarver got out her writing materials, and sat herself down at the table in the window.

She put the printed paper carefully into an envelope; and then spread out her paper and began to write.

Even at that distance Bessie could see.

"My dear Ned,—This comes hop——"

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The girl turned away her head, and gazed into the fire with a strange feeling of heart-sickness.

She breathed a silent prayer for help: that something might turn her mother's intention, even at this the eleventh hour;—though what was to do it she could not think. It was hopeless now, quite hopeless.

"Bess," said Charlie's voice at this moment, "what is a talent?"

Why had the boy chosen this time to introduce such a topic? How was she to undertake an explanation just when her heart was so sore on that very subject?

But Charlie often required her help in his preparation, and would not understand her refusing it.

"What makes you ask, Charlie?" she said, to gain time.

"We've got the 'Parable of the Talents' for this afternoon's questioning," he answered.

Bessie saw there was no hope of averting an answer, nor of avoiding a conversation on the subject.

So she gave her mind to the question at once.

She wondered just a little if her mother were listening; and glanced at her furtively.

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But she could not make out whether she were or not.

The widow was bending over her writing, with her back turned.

"A talent," said Bessie, accustomed to put everything into the most simple language for the little children at the infant-school, "is anything God has given us to make use of."

"But if we don't make use of it, is it a talent then?" asked Charlie.

"It is still a talent," she answered, "but a wasted one. The servant who hid his talent in the earth wasted it; but it was a talent all the same, and his lord, when he came, called him to account for it. So God will call us to account for the use we have made of our talents, or to answer for having wasted them."

She spoke in a low, rather hurried tone; but for all that, her words must have reached the widow's ears. For her pen stopped,—she was evidently listening.

Bessie, whose head was turned towards her little brother, did not observe it, and the conversation went on.

"I suppose very few people have talents?" said Charlie.

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"More than you would think," said Bessie, softly; "in fact, it seems to me, most people have a talent of some kind."

"What is mother's?" asked Charlie. Bessie hesitated a minute, and was going to speak, when Charlie interrupted her: "Washing, I suppose," he said, "and ironing; oh! and clear-starching, and I should think mangling, too."

"Yes," said Bessie, thoughtfully; "and mother makes use of her talents well."

"If she didn't wash, and iron, and clear-starch, and mangle, she'd be hiding her talents in the earth, wouldn't she?"

Bessie assented, adding, "and God has given her health and strength to do it with, for they are talents too."

"What other things are talents, Bess? tell me some everybody has got."

"Life, first of all," she answered: "God has given us each a life to make the best use we can of; and for the use we have made of it we shall have to give account some day. If we waste it, we shall have to answer for it to God when He comes, like the lord of the servants in the parable, and reckons with us. Then there is time, in the

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same way. Then there is youth and opportunity, and health and strength, and it's wonderful how we waste them all, without seeming to remember that we shall be called to account for the use we have made of them. Then again there are those that are more special and which are only given to a few, such as power, influence, money, and cleverness. After that come the gifts: preaching like St. Paul, writing books, painting, music, sculpture, and other things of that kind."

"I see," said Charlie, musingly; "and I suppose you've got a talent *and* a gift; for I heard our master say the other day, that you had such a talent for teaching, it was quite a gift. If you didn't teach, Bessie, should you be hiding a talent in the earth?"

"Yes," she answered, very low; "I believe so, Charlie."

The widow had put down her pen, and was sitting very still.

"Have I got any special talent, Bess?"

"Well, no, Charlie, I don't think you have."

Charlie drew a long breath of great relief.

"And Bill?" was the next question.

Bessie got hot all over; for she no longer heard

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the scratching of her mother's pen, and she began to think she must be listening. Had she dared look round, she would have seen the widow sitting bolt upright, with her unfinished letter before her.

"You know as well as I do," she said, almost in a whisper.

"Oh, carving," said Charlie, loudly; "so it is, of course. Why, that's something like painting, or sculpture, I should think. That's quite a gift, isn't it?"

Bessie bowed her head. She could not trust herself to speak.

"Then if Bill doesn't go on with his carving, he'll be hiding a talent in the earth, won't he?"

A very low answer from Bessie.

The widow moved restlessly in her chair.

"I mean it would be wasting a talent God has given him, wouldn't it?" the pertinacious voice went on.

Another low murmur from the girl. Another restless movement from the mother in the distance.

"Then he'd have to give account to God some day for not having made use of it; eh, Bess?"

"No!" came in low accents the reply; "it will

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not be his fault. He is so situated that he cannot help it."

The widow took up her unfinished letter, and tore it into little pieces.

"Well, I must be off," said Charlie, rising, and collecting his books. "Thank you, Bessie, I understand the parable much better now."

And he ran away, whistling.

Bessie sat quite still after he was gone, gazing sadly into the fire, and thinking more regretfully than ever of the wasted talent and the rejected opportunity.

A touch on her shoulder roused her.

Her mother was standing by her, holding out the printed paper.

"I've changed my mind about this," she said; "you may give it to Bill, and he can make what use he likes of it."

And before Bessie could recover from her surprise, her mother had left the room.

Bessie first bowed her head in silent thankfulness and wonder that her prayer should thus have been heard; then, hurriedly putting on her bonnet, she went in search of Bill.

We need not paint the interview, nor dwell

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upon the young man's astonishment, his bewildered feverish delight.

A flush rose on his cheek, a glad light came into his eye; he eagerly stretched out his hand for the paper, and greedily devoured the contents.

He covered his face for a moment, as if this sudden realization of his wishes were almost too much for him; and then he poured forth a torrent of questions.

When had it come? How had it come? How was it he had not heard of it before?

Bessie answered by giving him an account of yesterday, with its temptation, its conflict, and its final victory.

Her conduct met with his unqualified approval. He would not have had her act otherwise, he assured her, for all the Exhibitions in the kingdom.

"No good could ever have come of doing evil," he said; "and the first bad consequence would have been mother's putting down my discharge to my head having been turned by this prospect."

Brother and sister wandered slowly homewards arm in arm; building airy castles as they went, of Bill's future greatness.

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Their happy voices and their laughter rang out in the clear frosty air, and reached their mother's ear as she stood at the open door.

"Bless me, children, how merry you seem!" she exclaimed, as they entered the cottage together.

"And no wonder," said Bill, joyously, going up to her, paper in hand, and kissing her warmly.

"You're a foolish boy," she said, but she looked happy all the same; "and I'm a foolish woman to put such ideas into your head. But promise me one thing, Bill. It'll not make you give up your place. Promise me that!"

"Mother," said Bill, quietly, "my place has given me up."

The widow turned very pale, and looked rather frightened.

"Oh, Bill! what have you done?"

But when Bill explained the reason, her feelings underwent a sudden revulsion, and her indignation knew no bounds.

"It's not your fault, my poor lad," she exclaimed, "if you're made slight, like your father before you."

"No, mother," said Bill, "it isn't; but if you could

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see the boy who takes my place, you'd be the first to say the farmer was right. Such a strapping fellow! Quite my height, and twice my sinew! I do declare," he added, "he's going along the road now. Come to the window, mother, quick, and have a look at him!"

The widow was at his side in three strides. Her maternal vanity was wounded, and she was indignant at the idea of the "strapping fellow," who had eclipsed her boy.

"Well! I declare!" she wrathfully exclaimed; "I never saw such a great hulking, clumsy, clod-hopping creature in my life. Never you mind, Bill. I'd sooner see you what you are, my boy, if you lost all the good places in the world. At least you look like a man, though a slim one; and that fellow——"

"What does he look like, mother?" laughed Bill.

"I couldn't tell you," she answered, turning in disgust from the window, "for if I looked at him again, I should have no appetite for supper!"

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CHAPTER IX.

THE SISTER'S SELF-SACRIFICE.

BILL knew it was best to strike while the iron was hot, lest his mother should change her mind. He therefore lost no time in communicating with his uncle at Bournby, and he received in reply all the necessary instructions.

The next week passed quietly and uneventfully. The widow worked away harder than ever, and asked no questions when Bill disappeared for hours in his little den.

She had, as it were, given in under protest; and though she would not for worlds have retracted her permission, she yet wished to show that she herself was still of the same mind as ever; and so did not take any interest in the matter.

Bessie, relieved from the strain of her secret, and more hopeful than her mother, was very happy again; and if for a moment a misgiving came over her as to what was to become of them all if Bill

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did not succeed, like others, in getting noticed and helped through the Industrial Exhibition, she quickly chased it away; and her dreams of his future success surpassed even his own.

Bill, his heart beating high with hope, was absorbed in his work, and thought and cared for nothing else.

Early and late he toiled without ceasing; and there began to grow under his hands a work of rare beauty, which already, even in its outline, bore a resemblance to the box he had seen.

His great fear was of forgetting the design before he had sufficiently progressed to be able to work it out.

He was so afraid of its fading from his recollection.

It haunted him, this fear.

He would sit with his head between his hands, and his eyes closed, straining brain and memory to recall its every detail: but not always with entire success. He could not always remember it exactly. He got a little confused sometimes; and the details would crowd upon him with such distinctness, as to make him a little uncertain how to group them so as to form an harmonious whole.

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He needed sorely another sight of the box, to make certain how the parts blended together.

One day he got so hot and impatient over the incapability which possessed him of recalling the design to his satisfaction, that he left his little room, and went out into the garden to refresh himself in the air.

But the change of scene seemed only to obliterate more completely what he was trying to remember. He felt he must give up the hope of its returning to his mind for that day; and went into the wash-house to talk to his mother. She was busy sorting the clothes that had arrived that day from the Big House; and he stayed chatting some minutes.

All of a sudden, without his being aware of the cause, the scene in the little library returned to him, the box rose before him, design, details, and all.

His attention wandered from what his mother was saying, and he stood silent, gazing, as it seemed to her, into vacancy; while a look of eager intelligence spread itself over his face.

Hope awoke once more within him, and with a hastily muttered excuse, he hurried away to his den again, and eagerly set to work.

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"Bless the boy!" exclaimed his mother, as she plunged the clothes into the tub, "he's clean demented over that wood-work. He can't leave it for a minute to hear what one's got to say!"

What had he seen in the wash-house?

What power had been at work?

His eyes must have seen a vision to which his mother's were closed. The power of association was the unseen spell.

His eyes had fallen on something that had brought back the lid to his mind.

But it was only a tiny linen cuff, with the stain of a bonbon upon it!

Towards the end of a fortnight or so, the loss of Bill's wages began to make itself felt.

It was patent to each one, though no one made any remark upon it.

Everything approaching to a luxury disappeared by degrees from the table.

The truth was, no one but the widow was now contributing anything towards the family maintenance.

Rather the contrary: since both for Bessie and Charlie a weekly sum of money had to be forthcoming.

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It was getting clearer every day to the widow that this state of things could not go on.

There was no doubt in her mind that until Bill got work of some sort, Bessie must give up her teaching, and assist with the washing.

There was no other way of adding to the family funds. The widow could not undertake more washing by herself, and if she hired an assistant, the woman's pay would swallow up nearly all the extra money gained.

Mrs. Tarver knew it would be a great blow to her daughter, and from day to day she put off speaking to her on the subject, half hoping the girl would suddenly see the necessity herself, and spare her the pain of urging it upon her.

The poor mother pondered the matter as she worked and toiled without ceasing; but could think of no other way of increasing their means but by pressing Bessie into the service.

She took the precaution, however, of letting it be known in the village that Bill was out of work; and then waited a little to see what might turn up. But nothing came of it, and daily the meals grew more frugal, and the sting of poverty began to make itself felt.

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And meanwhile Bessie, though she said nothing, had told herself from the first how it must end.

It was only because she had seen no immediate prospect of there being more washing than her mother could do by herself, that she had refrained from speaking.

But coming home one evening from the schools, she saw two strange children playing in the rectory garden, and knew that the time had come.

For strangers meant guests to the rector, and guests meant extra washing.

It was all over then. Her hopes and ambitions must be given up for this year: for it only wanted a few weeks to the examination, and she needed every minute of her time to fit herself to pass it.

She leaned sadly against the gate, watching the children at their play, till she was roused by the voice of the rector's housekeeper calling her by name.

She opened the gate, and went in.

"Master's quite laid up with rheumatism," said the housekeeper, advancing to meet her. "His brother's come to take the duty for him, and brought his family with him. I was just going to send down to your mother to see if she can take

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their washing when I saw you coming along. You can tell me, I dare say."

"Oh, yes," said Bessie, mechanically, "we can take it: yes, we can take the washing."

"And then we shall want an odd man to do jobs inside and out while they are here. Your mother was saying your brother William was out of place. Would he like to come, do you think?"

If Bessie had felt weak before, she did so no longer now.

If she had told herself before that it was hard that she should have to give up all her cherished hopes and ambitions, all such thoughts were put to flight now. For well she knew that did she not undertake the washing, her mother would accept the place for Bill.

As only one need be sacrificed, it should be herself; not him. He, at any rate, should be left undisturbed, free to give his whole mind to his carving.

So she quickly, even eagerly, reiterated her assurances that she and her mother would take the extra washing, and in the same breath declined the "odd man's" place for Bill.

"Better me than him," she said to herself over

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and over again as she walked home; and she went straight to her mother, and told her what she had done.

The widow was greatly relieved. "I'm sorry for you, Bess," she said, "very sorry. But you see yourself it's the only thing to be done—don't you?"

"The only thing to be done," repeated Bessie; "yes, mother, I've seen that all along."

But she did not say a word about the offer to Bill.

And so no one ever knew of the sister's self-sacrifice, save He unto whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid.

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CHAPTER X.

THE FAIRY CHILD AT THE INFANT-SCHOOL.

Of course as Bill went on with his work the difficulties increased. Some parts were comparatively easy, but there were others that baffled him.

Either the task he had undertaken was beyond him, or else a good deal had escaped his notice.

After all, he had only seen it once. He felt sure that another glance at the box would remove the difficulty; but then how was he ever to get into the little library again?

He was almost out of heart one Saturday, Bessie's last day at the schools.

So he threw down his knife, and bethought him of going to meet her, to soften her sorrow at leaving, and to pour his own troubles into her ear.

He started off accordingly; but arrived at his destination much too soon.

It wanted half an hour or more to the time for breaking up.

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He sat down on a bank outside the schools; and closing his eyes, strove once more to summon up the box before him.

It was a soft spring day: the air blew pleasantly in his face: he felt soothed already.

Presently from within the school-house broke out upon the still air a burst of little voices:

> "'Tis a lesson you should learn:
> Try, try, try again," etc., etc.

It chimed in with Bill's feelings very pleasantly: the words seemed to give him hope and encouragement, and the singing of the little voices in unison was very soothing; and so was the clap of all the little hands at regular intervals.

He began to think of Dick Whittington on the milestone, listening to the chimes bidding him back to hope and fortune; and wondered if he might gather courage in the same way.

Were not the little voices holding out hopes of success to him too?

Was any difficulty ever surmounted except by the perseverance of which they sang?——

But the children had ceased singing, and all was very still.

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By-and-by, through the silent air, there fell upon his ear the clattering of a pony's hoofs in the distance.

Nearer and nearer they approached.

At last they stopped suddenly.

There was a merry laugh close to him, and a silvery voice said in clear, rather imperious tones, "William Tarver!"

But Bill did not look up.

For something, he knew not what, had transported him back, he knew not wherefore, to the little library at the Big House, to the place where he longed to be!

There was the box, standing on the table! Its design was returning to him! and fervently he hoped naught might disturb him, till he had made it his own once more.

Vain hope!

Again the silvery voice exclaims, "William Tarver!"

This time he recognizes it, and opens his eyes.

He sees before him a tiny pony, and on it the fairy child.

He *hardly* sees her, for her presence recalls the box.

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Clearer and clearer she seems to bring it before him.

They are so inseparably connected, these two; he cannot disunite them.

Here are the laughing eyes, and the wild fair hair; and resting on the pony is an ungloved hand, —the same that rested on the lid! And there, close by, rises behind her the feathery foliage, and the grouping of the perfect whole!

"You don't look as if you knew me," said little Miss Herbert. "I'll take off my hat."

She did so, and shaking her hair out of her eyes, she exclaimed, "There! *now* do you remember me?"

"I beg your pardon, miss," he said, rising slowly, and taking off his cap; "I think I was half asleep."

"Well! it *is* lucky I found you here," she said; "for I've come to hear the children at the infant-school do their lessons like you advised me to, and I shall want some one to show me the way."

Bill looked rather scared.

"So now you can take me in," she went on, gathering up her skirts and jumping off her pony. "Give me your hand, and come with me, for I don't like going in alone."

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Bill demurred.

"Take me in, I say," said the spoiled child. "You never *will* do what I ask you."

"What about the pony, miss?"

"The pony will stand. Take me in!"

Thus driven into a corner, Bill took her little outstretched hand; and they entered the school together.

Bessie was sitting with her little class round her, the only teacher in the room. The smallest child in the school was on her lap; another was leaning against her, the rest were all pressing as close as they could. She was telling them she should not be able to come and teach them any more.

There was consternation on all the little faces; one child was crying.

At the sound of footsteps Bessie looked up, and to her astonishment, she saw her brother advancing towards her, leading little Miss Herbert by the hand.

She rose up, and came to meet them, some of the children still clinging to her, and impeding her progress.

"Let me go, dears," she whispered, trying to disengage herself from their grasp.

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But the children, their heads full of the announcement she had just made them, clung tighter to her, crying, "No, no, you mustn't go. Stay with us."

"I'm not going away," she said, soothingly; "only just going to speak to the little lady."

They relaxed their hold after this, though they kept their eyes upon her rather fearfully.

Little Miss Herbert had been an attentive observer of the scene. "How fond they seem of her!" she said to Bill.

Then, leaving go of his hand, she ran forward to Bessie, and said, "William Tarver says you teach them their geography. I want to hear them do it."

Bessie wondered Bill should have picked out that particular branch of study for display, as the infants' knowledge of it was of course of the most limited order.

"They do very little of that, miss," she answered; "they're such little things; but you shall hear what they can do. Bill, will you get Miss Herbert a chair?"

Bill placed a seat by his sister, and then slipped away without speaking. He was eager to get back

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to his work while the inspiration by which he was seized was still upon him.

Bessie gathered her little class around her, and put them through a few simple questions. They acquitted themselves very well.

Little Miss Herbert sat perched upon her chair, listening attentively; and then looked up plaintively at Bessie with her great eyes.

"I wish somebody would teach *me* as nicely as that," she said. "It's more like play than lessons."

The young teacher smiled. "You shall see them at play now, miss. They play and sing at the same time."

The infants were soon arranged in a circle, and went through the "Peasant" with its accompanying gesticulations. The little girl's delight knew no bounds; she got nearer and nearer, and at last joined the ring herself.

The sudden advent of a new and undisciplined scholar was too much for the infants. Rules were forgotten, and the game finished in wild disorder.

Bessie was glad to see the children had forgotten their troubles; and left them to enjoy themselves unrebuked for a time.

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But the hour for dismissal was at hand, and she called them to order at last.

Beckoning Miss Herbert to her side, she made the infants march past her, two and two; curtsying or bowing as they passed on their way out.

Very regretfully the young teacher's eyes followed each little couple as they disappeared; and as the tiny child she had had on her lap trotted off in charge of an elder brother of five, they filled with tears. She felt it all too probable she should never superintend their little games again.

She shook off her depression, and turned to the little lady at her side.

The child was gazing almost as mournfully at the open door by which the children had disappeared. The room seemed so forlorn, so deserted: the silence they had left behind them was so great.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she exclaimed; "I *wish* they hadn't gone. I haven't had such a game for years and years! What fun it was, and what happy little children they must be! I wish *I* was a little poor child, and could come and do my lessons at the infant-school with you. You do it so nicely, and never stop them if they make a little noise, *do* you?"

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Bessie sighed. "No, Miss Herbert, I like to make them love their little lessons. It's what makes me happier than anything."

Just then came a knock at the door, and a white scared face looked in.

A voice uttered an exclamation of relief and satisfaction, and the coachman, who had been riding with Miss Herbert, appeared in the doorway.

The child, he told Bessie, had given him the slip while he had been shutting a gate: and he had not been able to make up his mind which of three roads she had taken. Of course he had picked out the wrong one; but finding out his mistake, he had turned back, and had tracked her to the school-house, where the sight of the riderless pony had filled him with alarm.

"Please come home now, missie," he pleaded. "It's long past your tea-time, and your mamma will be getting so uneasy and anxious."

The child stood up, and looked round.

"Where's William Tarver?" she said. "I want to say good-by to him."

"He has gone home long ago," Bessie answered.

"He's very unkind," she said, plaintively; "he never *will* say good-by."

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"He is so busy just now," said Bessie, apologetically; "he hasn't a minute to spare from his work."

The little creature seemed mollified by this explanation, and condescended to be led to the door, and to mount her pony. "I shall soon be back again," she called out to Bessie as she galloped off, "to see you make the children play and sing. Soon, very soon!"

The little figure with its streaming hair disappeared in the distance; the echo of the pony's clattering hoofs died away: and silence and sadness settled down again on the young teacher's heart.

She returned into the empty school-room, now doubly quiet and deserted; and she shook her head as she half-unconsciously repeated the child's parting words.

"You will never see that any more," she murmured; "that is all over now."

She put on her bonnet, and after taking a farewell glance at the familiar scene of her past labors, she walked slowly and sadly home.

When the dusk came on, Bill, who till then had toiled full of hope and inspiration, felt the design was once more fading from him; and, as the light grew fainter, his heart grew fainter too.

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He threw aside his knife, and strove to recall the events of the afternoon, hoping that the feeling of inspiration might return with them.

And as he sat thus in the gloaming, half asleep and very dreamy, they came back in a strange medley to his mind.

He was sitting, like Dick Whittington, on a milestone, only by the school-house door.

The air was full of music, and a band of little voices sang.

Close by was the fairy child, leaning against a table, stretching out her hand. And on the table stood the box.

Something the child was saying, which he longed and strained to hear.

And as he gazed upon her, she opened her lips and sang:—

"If you find you don't succeed,
Try, try, try again."

* * * * * *

Whether he had slept or no, he knew not, but when he took up his knife again the difficulty had vanished away.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE SISTER'S REWARD.

THAT was Bill's last difficulty. Thenceforward all went smoothly.

And now the day was rapidly approaching when the contributions to the Exhibition must be sent to Bournby.

He put the finishing touches to his work; and prepared to exhibit it to his mother, before packing it up.

Not that she had shown any more interest in it as time went on. From first to last she had continued to manifest the same indifference. He and Bessie decided to put it on a little table, so as to make it look as much as possible like its fellow at the Big House; and then Mrs. Tarver was to be called in, to give her opinion.

The morning of the day on which this little plot was to be carried out, Bessie and her mother were hard at work in the wash-house, when a message

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came from the Big House, to say that Mrs. Herbert wished to see Mrs. Tarver immediately. So unusual a summons filled the widow with surprise, not unmingled with a little indignation.

"Why couldn't she have waited till the evening, instead of making one dress up in the middle of the day!" she wrathfully exclaimed, as she withdrew her arms from the soap-suds in which they were plunged, and went up-stairs to change her gown.

In about half an hour she returned, flushed and breathless, with radiant face, and eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Good news!" she called out to Bessie and Bill, who met her at the door; "wonderful news, I can hardly believe it yet! Here's little Miss Herbert taken such a fancy to you, Bess, from hearing you teach at the infant-school, that she wants you to be her daily governess; and Mrs. Herbert sent for me to ask whether you would give up your teacher's place, if she made it worth your while. Let me sit down, Bill, for I'm quite upset with the suddenness-like of the thing."

Bessie's heart was beating so with surprise and delight, that she could not steady her voice to

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make any remark. She placed a chair for her mother in silence: for Bill was too excited to take any notice of the widow's request for a seat.

"Go on, mother," he exclaimed; "don't stop. Tell us all about it from the very beginning. Don't leave out a word."

Mrs. Tarver went on to say that ever since the little girl's visit to the school, she had been imploring that she might be allowed to go and learn there with the little children; or at least that if that were denied her, she might have Elizabeth to teach her at home.

Mrs. Herbert had at first treated the child's request as a passing fancy: but finding it repeated day after day, she had at last taken it into consideration. She had feared there were great difficulties in the way, because she had not understood that Bessie no longer attended the school; and she had assured the child Bessie would never consent to give up her place.

Wearied, however, by the little girl's persistency, and unaccustomed to have to cross her in any way, she had at last determined to send for the widow, and to see if an arrangement of any kind could be effected.

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Her joy at finding everything so smooth and easy had been great; and she had made her own terms at once.

Bessie was to attend daily from nine to two o'clock, at eight shillings a week.

"And you're to go up there this afternoon, Bessie," concluded the widow, "to show yourself, and to get your orders. It's a wonderful bit of good fortune, *sure—ly!*"

Bessie presented herself before the invalid lady at the appointed hour.

To play with the little girl, and keep her amused and happy while Mrs. Herbert was up-stairs; to introduce a little teaching, if possible, but on no account to bother the child with lessons: such were the injunctions delivered to her in a feeble, slightly querulous tone: and she willingly promised obedience.

The girl's face bore such evident tokens of happiness in the arrangement, that the invalid paused, and looked at her with languid surprise.

"You're fond of teaching then, I suppose," she said, eyeing her curiously and half enviously.

"Oh, yes, ma'am," said Bessie; "I've missed it so since I left the school, and it makes me so

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happy to think of beginning again. I'm only sorry to think——"

She hesitated, checked by the expression of Mrs. Herbert's face.

"Sorry to think what?" exclaimed the invalid, helplessly. "Oh, dear me! I hope there are not going to be any objections, just as I thought it was all arranged."

"Objections!" repeated Bessie, clasping her hands; "how could I make objections to *anything!* Oh, no, ma'am. You misunderstand me altogether. I was only going to say I was sorry to think I was taking the pleasure from you."

"Oh, well, you needn't be," said Mrs. Herbert, settling down again on her sofa cushions with a sigh of relief; "for it's no pleasure to me at all. It makes me so sadly nervous."

"*Nervous!*" said Bessie, puzzled.

But Mrs. Herbert held up her hand warningly; for the child had entered the room.

"You're going to be my governess, *ain't* you?" she said, bounding up to Bessie; "and you'll teach me all those nice games and songs with the jumping and clapping of hands?"

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"I hope there won't be a great deal of noise," said the invalid, nervously.

Bessie reassured her on that point, and then rose to take her leave. The child followed her downstairs, talking all the way.

"Do you think you'll be able to make me like my lessons?" she asked, "because mammy can't. But then, you see, she isn't nice and merry over them like you are, and she can't bear me to make any noise—not the least little bit of noise. I think I could do them so much better if I might make just a little. She gets a headache directly, *You* don't have headaches, do you?" she said suddenly, stopping short on the stairs, and looking with horror into Bessie's face.

"No, never, Miss Herbert," smiled Bessie; "and I'm sure I shall be able to make you like your lessons. We shall have such happy times together, you and I!"

The child fairly laughed with delight; and repeatedly kissed her hand to Bessie, as she stood watching her off from the hall door. "Come *very* early to-morrow," she called out; "come very early and stay very late!"

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Bessie kissed her hand in answer, and sped merrily home.

That evening the box was put on a little table in Bill's den, with a candle on each side of it.

After admiring it for a minute, Bessie went in search of her mother, and told her Bill had got something to show her in his room.

The widow came in; and her son and daughter watched her countenance eagerly.

But to their dismay, the moment her eye lighted on the box, she started as if she had seen a spectre; and then looked much agitated.

"Now, Bill!" she said, harshly, "what trick is this you are playing me? How did you get hold of that?"

"What do you mean, mother?" exclaimed Bill.

"You know very well what I mean!" she answered; "you got that box from the Big House."

Bill and Elizabeth fairly shouted with delight, while their mother looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"Bill carved it, mother," cried Bessie.

"It's my contribution to the Bournby Exhibition," exclaimed Bill.

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"Nonsense!" she said, sharply; "don't tell me. Do you think *I* could be deceived about that box? It came off the table that stands in the window in the little library."

She was working herself into a state of incontrollable agitation; and Bill hastily explained.

But the explanation seemed only to agitate her more; and, at last, she fairly ran out of the room.

"Now, Bessie," said Bill, turning to his sister, "what new mystery is this? How can the box at the Big House be any way connected with my mother's past life, that the sight of my copy should upset her in this way?"

"Perhaps," suggested Bessie, "going to the Big House so soon after father's death, anything she was accustomed to see then recalls her grief to her."

Bill was not satisfied with the explanation, but agreed with his sister that it might be so.

"At any rate," he said, "I may console myself with the thought of mother having mistaken my box for the original. It shows it must be more like than I imagined."

The next day he walked with it to the station, and saw it off by the train.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE BONBON BOX.

BESSIE began her tuition at the Big House on the following morning.

Bill, for the next few days, worked in the garden, and did what he could to help his mother, while he waited for news from Bournby.

The suspense made him very restless. Sometimes, he was full of hope; at others, he told himself he had been over-sanguine.

The 7th of April came and passed: and now Bill began to look for every post from Bournby, and his heart would beat as the hour drew near.

"We might very easily hear to-day," he said to Bessie, as he walked with her to the Big House on the morning of the 10th. "I feel very hopeful, somehow, this morning, Bess. Something seems to tell me everything will turn out well. Perhaps it is because it is such a beautiful day," he added, stopping short, and looking round at the green

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fields full of little lambs, the banks covered with primroses, the ground blue with wild hyacinths; the sun shining brightly upon all.

Bessie stopped, too, enjoying with him the beauty of the spring morning.

They stood listening for some minutes to the glad song of a hundred birds around them, and the soft sound of the cuckoo in the distance.

"Good-by, dear Bill," said Bessie, when they reached the Big House door. "Come and meet me after your dinner, for I shall be panting to know if you have had any news." She stood for a moment watching him as he disappeared down the lane, marking with sisterly pride his tall, slight figure, and the erect carriage of his head.

"He's meant for something great, I'm sure," she said, fondly.

"Cuckoo!" sounded close by, from the top of one of the trees in the garden.

It seemed to her to come like an amen to the words she had just uttered; and she smiled brightly as she entered the house.

"Mrs. Herbert would like to see you in about an hour's time, in her bedroom," said the servant who opened the door. The summons was un-

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usual, for hitherto Bessie had rarely seen the invalid lady.

Her little pupil was not able to tell her why she was wanted; but in the course of conversation observed that "mammy had had a letter from Aunt Mary at Bournby this morning."

The news made Bessie's heart beat, and rendered her restless and preoccupied. She found herself watching the clock, and longing for the moment to come when she should present herself before Mrs. Herbert.

It came at last, and with some trepidation Bessie went up-stairs, and knocked at the bedroom door.

"Come in," said a weak, rather trembling voice; and Bessie entered.

The invalid was lying on the sofa in her dressing-gown, with an open letter in her hand. "Pray sit down," she said. "I've had a letter from my sister-in-law at Bournby this morning, which has puzzled me rather, and I think you can help me."

Bessie sat down.

"It seems they have had one of these Industrial Exhibitions there; and that the prize for carving has been gained by your brother."

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Bessie clasped her hands with delight, and grew crimson to the roots of her hair.

The invalid looked rather uneasy. "This is news to you, I see," she said; "yes, it's very pleasant for you; but don't agitate yourself, my good girl. I'm not very strong this morning. That wasn't the point of what I was going to say. My sister-in-law says he is a most promising young man; and that the foreman of a great church decoration shop in London, who happened to be at the Exhibition, declares his contribution shows very rare talent. You'll be pleased to hear this—yes—but I have not got to the point yet. It seems your brother has contributed a carved antique box, which he has done from memory, after seeing the original once; and when questioned as to where he saw it, he answered, in the Big House at Grinfield! that is, here! in my house! I can't understand it at all; and it's made me so nervous."

"I think I can explain, ma'am," said Bessie. "My brother waited here one day for a message in the little library, and there he saw the box."

The invalid looked a little happier, but was evidently only partially relieved.

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"That is not all, you see," she said. "The worst part is that the Committee say it's such a beautiful bit of carving that my sister-in-law has been desired to write and ask me where I got the original box; and she wants an answer by return of post. The very idea of a Committee makes me so nervous that I can't collect my thoughts at all."

Here the child slipped in, and sat down on the foot of the sofa.

"I can't think what box it can be," said the invalid, helplessly.

"Perhaps Miss Herbert could help you," suggested Bessie; and with the mother's permission, she explained to the little girl the subject under discussion.

"It must be my bonbon box," said the child.

"Your bonbon box!" repeated the poor lady, uneasily. "What bonbon box? I can't remember anything to-day. The letter coming so early, and the flurry of having to answer it so early, and the Committee, and altogether, have confused me terribly. Fetch the box, my darling pet, there's a dear, good, obedient little girl."

The child ran off eagerly, and Bessie followed

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her down-stairs, and into the little library, and up to the table in the window.

When Bessie's eyes fell upon the box, she was struck dumb with astonishment at the accuracy of Bill's copy. It seemed to her as if this were the very same she had seen gradually grow under his hand at home.

Her heart was beating with hope and excitement as she carried it up-stairs; but she was forced to control herself on account of the invalid lady.

"I'm so afraid even now of not being able to give any account of it," the nervous voice was saying as Bessie and the child entered the room. "I feel as if I was being cross-examined in a witness-box. It's a most disagreeable affair altogether."

But the moment her eyes lighted on the box, she exclaimed, "*That* box! Dear me! Why, that box was sold to me years and years ago, by your mother!"

"*By my mother!*" exclaimed Bessie.

"Yes," she said. "Don't be excited—*please!* "It's very simple. When she came to be my laundrymaid, or rather when she left to set up for herself, I bought it of her out of charity."

The invalid lay back on the sofa and gave a

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great sigh of relief; as much as to say the responsibility rested now on the shoulders of another, and that she washed her hands of it.

Bessie meanwhile was so bewildered that she stood staring at Mrs. Herbert vacantly, trying to put her thoughts into shape.

The invalid writhed under her gaze.

"You had better go home to your mother, and make inquiries. Look, take the letter with you and let her read it. Bring it, and the answer, back before post-time, that I may write to my sister-in-law this afternoon. And now I think I'll try and get a little sleep before lunch."

Bessie got up, too glad to make her escape, so great was her longing to see Bill. She put on her things hastily, and took a short cut across the garden into the lane. She sped along the road on the wings of the wind, and never halted till she reached the cottage door.

"Bill!" she cried, joyfully.

But there was no answer, and no one seemed to be at home.

"Bill!" she cried, crossing the kitchen, and she opened the door of his little room. But the room was empty: there was no one there.

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Bessie was completely mystified; she could not make it out.

In her mother's bedroom were signs of a hasty departure; her week-day dress lay on the bed, and the cupboard containing her Sunday clothes was empty.

It was the same in Bill's room.

What could have happened!

Where could they both have gone!

And where was Charlie? For it was past twelve o'clock, so he must have come home from school. It was so strange that they should have gone off so suddenly, without leaving a message or a letter for her. But though she searched everywhere she found no letter of explanation, no clue to their sudden departure.

It was so odd that they should not have sent her a message by Charlie.

It was very mysterious, and altogether most disappointing when she had so much to tell.

She sat down, feeling quite distressed, when quick footsteps fell upon her ear; and running to the door, she encountered Charlie, with a telegram in his hand.

"Hurrah!" he shouted; "here you are; I can't

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think how I missed you. Such news, Bess! Bill's got the prize, and he's been sent for to Bournby. I've been all the way to the Big House to tell you; and you had just gone. Look here! Read it."

Bessie took the telegram, and eagerly opened it. It was addressed to Bill, from his uncle; it was as follows:

"You have got the prize. Come to Bournby by next train, and bring anything else you have ever carved with you. All expenses will be paid."

Charlie then told her that Bill had only just had time to get his things together, and to start. He had borrowed a cart from a neighbor, or else he could not have caught the train. He had been very sorry not to be able to see Bessie before he went, and had sent her every kind of message. Their mother had gone with him to the station, to see him off, and to drive the cart home.

Bessie decided to wait quietly till her mother returned, as it was no use going back to Mrs. Herbert without an answer. She explained to Charlie that, in her haste, she had come out of the Big House by the front door, and taken a short cut across the garden, which accounted for her having missed him on the road.

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In due time the widow arrived, looking flushed, excited, and, as it were, triumphant in spite of herself.

Bessie could tell her more than the telegram; and the mother looked highly delighted at the mention of the foreman of the church decoration shop.

But as the girl went on to deliver Mrs. Herbert's message, the widow's face changed. She turned away in some agitation, and answered sharply that Bessie need not return to the Big House, as she would go up herself and give the required answer.

"Won't you tell *me*, mother?" said poor Bessie, wistfully.

"I may some day," was the reply, "but it will not be till Bill comes home again."

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERY CLEARED UP.

Two days after, the Bournby local paper arrived at the cottage, directed in Uncle Ned's handwriting. The account of the Industrial Exhibition was scored on each side with ink, and one passage in particular deeply underlined.

It related to the fact of the prize for carving having been gained by the son of a poor washerwoman; who had never received any instruction, or even had proper tools to work with, in his life.

Bessie had the pleasure of reading this paragraph out loud to her mother and Charlie.

The widow's face was a study during the reading. An expression of would-be indifference struggled with maternal pride on her countenance; and though she affected not to be listening with any great interest, and went on ironing all the time, she did not really lose a word. More than once Bessie observed with delight that the iron

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remained poised in the air, while her mother's whole attitude denoted rapt attention.

Bessie was a little disappointed at not receiving a letter from Bill by the same post; but before she had time to wonder why he had not written, arrived Bill himself!

And such a radiant, triumphant Bill, that Bessie often declared afterwards, she hardly knew him again the first moment. For he seemed to have grown in those few days at least half an inch taller, and several years older, so erect was the carriage of his head, and so full of life and self-dependence his whole demeanor.

And well might it be so! For he had attained the height of his ambition: his hopes and his longings were fulfilled.

The foreman of the church decoration shop had at once engaged him as a workman: and at a rate of wages which would not only support Bill himself, but leave a surplus for him to send to his mother.

Nor was this all.

His carving had been unanimously declared to be something quite out of the common; and the foreman had assured him that if he went on as he

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had begun, he would in time make a name and a fortune.

When Bill had recounted to his delighted audience thus far, he suddenly wheeled round to his mother and looked her full in the face.

"Little mother," he said, gently, "where did you get the box which has been the means of so much? It is declared to be a most accurate copy of Gibbons; and they say that it must actually have been copied from a certain bit of his work well known to be in the possession of a certain English nobleman. The Committee wrote to Mrs. Herbert to ask her how she came by it, and her answer was——"

"That she bought it of me," interrupted the widow, hurriedly. "That's what she said. I dictated the answer myself."

"Yes," returned Bill; "and now the Committee desire me to put the same question to you. That that box is connected with our past life, and with all that you have hitherto concealed from us, I feel sure. And now, mother, you must unfold this double mystery to us. The time for an explanation has come, and you must withhold it no longer."

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He spoke with a mixture of tenderness and authority, but in a very determined way. And then added, as if in explanation of his tone,—

"My grandfather offered to tell me all that I wanted to know, but I said I would hear it from my mother alone."

"There is no further need of concealment," cried the widow. "I will tell you all. The box was carved by your father!"

"By our father!" they all exclaimed; and Bill sprang to his feet in violent excitement.

"Yes," she said, half-proudly, half-mournfully. "Bill's talent, children, is inherited; for your father was a carver too!"

They pressed her with questions till she told them they were the children of Wilhelm Tarver, a younger son in a highly respected German family; who had left his fatherland, and come as an adventurer to England to make a name and a fortune by his talent; both of which he had utterly failed in doing.

"But *why?*" burst forth Bill, "why did he fail? With such a wonderful talent as his, how could he fail?"

"Ah, Bill!" she answered, "you are young, and

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know little of the difficulties of life. You seem to think everything is possible, and everything is easy. But I know more about the struggles and the obstacles on the way than you do. However, I will tell you his history and mine, from the beginning to the end,—and then you shall judge for yourself."

She sighed deeply, as if the plunge into the past which she was about to make were a pain and a grief to her, and then began,—

"I was not quite seventeen when I first saw your father.

"I remember that evening as if it were yesterday.

"It had been a piping hot day, and I was standing at my father's cottage door, enjoying the breeze that had just sprung up, when I saw in the distance a figure coming along the road.

"A tall, slight stranger, to look at just such another as Bill is now. Though he was limping with fatigue, and was covered with dust, I could see he was no tramp, even all that long way off; and when he came nearer, I fell to wondering who he could be; for there was a something about him different to the men I'd been used to see." When

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he got up to the cottage, he stopped, took off his hat, and said to me in a faint voice, in a kind of broken English, 'I am very weary: would you be so good to give me a glass of water?'

"Hearing voices, my father came out, and he stayed talking to the stranger while I went to get the water. When I came back, I found father had brought him in, and was letting him rest in the kitchen. He took the water and drank it eagerly; but in rising to put down the mug on the table, he put his hands to his head, and swooned away. The long and short of it was, he had had a sunstroke. We sent for the doctor, and he said he must not move from our house. He was very ill for a long time, and my mother and I nursed him between us.

"As he grew better, he told us his history. He had left his native land to escape the conscription, thereby deeply offending his father, for the Tarvers were a family of soldiers, and had been for generations. Hundreds of his countrymen, he told us, were every day leaving Germany for the same reason, and emigrating to Australia and America; but he preferred to come to England, to work his way to fame.

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"His father had, however, given him his portion of the inheritance, and with this little fortune in his bag he was going to London. He called it a little fortune; but to us poor folk it seemed large.

"When he was well enough to go, he asked me to come with him. He said I was strong and brave, and that he wanted such a wife as I should make, to be his right-hand and helpmeet in the life he was going to begin.

"I had learned to love him: so gentle and so grateful as he was, who could help it! and I said I would follow him to the world's end.

"My father and mother didn't like it; but they didn't know how to say no, for they saw my mind was made up, and they knew they should never be able to turn me from my purpose: and so we were married. We didn't go straight to London. There was some beautiful carving at a house he knew of near Stamford, and he had set his heart on seeing it.

"So we went to Stamford; and from there made an expedition to see this carving.

"I mind the day well, and no wonder, for it was the happiest I ever spent; and often in the dark

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days that came after, it's eased my sore heart to look back upon it.

"It was a glorious summer day in the middle of June; we dressed ourselves in our Sunday best, and went off together to Burghley.

"We sauntered all along the shady avenue that leads to the house, laughing and talking, and listening to the birds; and we were very happy. And we came to the grand old house, and were let in; for it was a visitor's day. And we walked through the grand rooms and passages, till we came to one where the walls were covered with carving; and he stopped short in delight, and stood staring up at it like a mad thing, talking to himself in German.

"It didn't seem much to me; not half so well worth looking at as the beautiful carpets and curtains, and other things in the room. And I wanted him to come and look at them instead; but I couldn't get him to move, and he said something about a Mr. Gibbs or Gibbins or some such person. (I haven't heard the name since, Bill, till you mentioned it just now.) And he sat down opposite it, and took out a pencil, and began to draw. I sat down too, and talked to him all the time; and we

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spent a happy hour in the quiet, cool room. It has been something, children, as I said before, to have the memory of such a day as that to turn to in all the dark times that came after. And now you know why I love that carved box so well. For on the lid is the bit of carving that recalls that day to my mind. The sight of it even now gives me a kind of feeling of being young again, and brings along with it a sort of mixture of hope and happiness and sunshine;—just like a pot of mignonette in our dingy London lodging used to give me a whiff of my country home. I sold the box to Mrs. Herbert at last, to pay for the wash-tubs and things when I set up as a laundress. It didn't seem like parting with it altogether; for I thought I should see it now and again at the Big House.

"Well, the rest of that day we wandered about the beautiful park, and the day after we went on to London."

The widow stopped, and sighed. How was she to tell Wilhelm Tarver's children of his faults, of his weak, vacillating character, of his total want of industry and perseverance, of his idle, selfish way of allowing her to toil and slave, while he took his ease, and worked or not, as it pleased him? Of

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her disappointment in him as day by day her eyes opened more to his weak points; of his getting orders for carving, and his either not executing them, or so delaying that his employers and customers, in disgust, by degrees fell away from him?

She softened all this as best she could, and dwelt more upon his want of strength, and upon the overstocked state of the trade in London.

At last had come sickness, debt, and increased expenses after the births of the children.

She herself had been unable to find time, between the care of a sick husband and a young family, to earn sufficient to pay the rent, and to provide food and clothing for them all: and the crash came.

Shortly after Charlie's birth, the bailiffs entered the house; and the whole family were obliged to go to the work-house. There her husband had died; and she had then left London forever.

Was it a wonder, she passionately asked, as, overcome by the recollection of all the sad past, she sank upon a chair weeping bitterly, that, knowing from whom Bill inherited his talent, she should have tried to keep him from the path that had proved such a pitfall to his father?

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Her children, carried away by her story, and filled with love and admiration for her conduct, were unanimous in assuring her that she had indeed acted for the best. Tenderly they soothed and kissed her, and thanked her for all she had done.

For though, in her recital, she had, while slurring over her husband's weakness, equally passed over in silence her own heroic efforts, her own determined perseverance in work of every kind, by which means alone the final crash had been so long averted,—yet William and Elizabeth saw clearly enough how it had been.

But the reader, who owes no filial reverence to the poor washerwoman, will see where she made a grievous mistake. She had laid all the blame of her husband's failure in life, and the consequent ruin of his family, upon his talent instead of upon himself, and had not realized the difference in character between the father and the son.

She had failed to see in Bill her own determined resolution and indomitable perseverance; which, joined to the talent he had inherited from his father, would surely bring him the success which that father neither attained nor deserved.

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She had thwarted him in every possible way from his earliest childhood: but in the end she was thwarted herself.

For, as we have seen, her intentions were frustrated, and her efforts overruled by a village Industrial Exhibition.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE GREAT CARVER'S GREATEST WORK.

In a very little while Bill started for London, where his marvelous talent rapidly developed itself, and he as rapidly rose.

He lost no time in communicating with his German relations, who were delighted to hear of his existence, and of that of the rest of the family.

They entreated him to come over and establish himself among them, as soon as he had made sufficient progress in his art to set up for himself.

This Bill accordingly did; and in the course of time was able to make a home for his mother. He then wrote to his family to follow him.

"You shall never toil too hard any more, mother," he said; "but shall be mistress of my house, and do just as much or as little as you feel inclined. Charlie shall go to a military school, and follow out his wish to be a soldier. And tell Bessie there are plenty of little children here, and

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plenty of schools to teach them in; so she may yet carry out her schemes, and gratify her old ambitions."

The summons came just in time. Bessie, having implanted in her little pupil a love of learning, and habits of attention and industry, had for some time felt the child's education should now be confided to more skillful hands. The widow was longing for a little rest, for the strain of her hard life was beginning to tell upon her health; and both mother and daughter were pining for Bill, from whom they had never before been separated.

Charlie, too, it need not be said, was enchanted at the prospect held out to him.

They gladly obeyed it, therefore, and were joyfully received by Bill in their Fatherland.

There the poor widow led a happy life; enjoying that immunity from care and toil which had never before been hers; surrounded by her children and her grandchildren, and proudly watching her Wilhelm's success.

There Karl in due time had his dreams fulfilled; for he joined the Prussian army and became a distinguished soldier.

And there Elizabeth found the hopes held out

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to her in Bill's letter fully realized: for, as years went on, she gathered little children round her knee once more.

But her old schemes she relinquished, and her ambitions ran to waste; for *these* children called her "mother," and they were her very own!

And so the family of Tarver passed away from the village of Grinfield, not even leaving their name behind.

For fifteen years they had lived there—did *no* trace of their sojourn remain?

Nay—but we cannot live anywhere for so long without leaving our mark: our influence for evil or for good.

So, though the laundress was gone forever, the memory of her industry remained.

Her hard-working perseverance, her energy, and her determination are still talked of at Grinfield, are still held up as a pattern to the young.

Bessie lives still in the hearts of her little pupils; and is forever an example of gentleness, patience, and unselfishness to all succeeding teachers in the school.

And William Tarver, the boy who so deeply de-

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plored the evils existing at Grinfield; what mark did he leave upon it? what influence of his was left behind him to work any change?

When he quitted the village, it was just what he had always known it—neglected, uncared for, and devoid of every kind of advantage. But by-and-by, as years went on, great changes and improvements began to be seen.

Flower shows, night schools, penny readings, and book clubs were established: gradually the village lost its neglected appearance; the population improved—grew cleaner, tidier, more civilized, and consequently more prosperous.

In due time, a young, active clergyman succeeded the poor, broken-down old rector: the church was restored, and the services were more frequent.

Houses were built in the village; it spread. A local railway in time was established, and a little station was built on the site of the Tarvers' home.

But what has all this to do with Bill?

Simply that this is his work: this the mark he has left behind.

Not that he has done it knowingly, or by the force of his own will.

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Toiling away in his German studio, Grinfield has almost faded from his mind.

His has been that indirect influence which is such a wonderful power in the world.

These glorious fruits have sprung from seed unconsciously sown by his hand.

Long, long ago, he had sown it broadcast in the heart of a little child. Not more deeply had the first sight of real art sunk into the soul of the artist than had his own passionate words of complaint and reproach sunk into the heart of that child.

That far-away interview in the little library had done a double work.

It had been *his* first insight into a world harmonious, a world of beauty and perfection, lying somewhere beyond him, but yet not out of reach.

It had been *her* first insight into a world discordant, a world of want and imperfection, lying around her, outside her door, at her very feet.

Then had come to him an intuitive conviction that he had a part in that world of talent, and that he could play it well.

Then had come to her a faint, a shadowy suspicion that she, or hers, might have a part to play,

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though all unplayed as yet, in the well-being of the world around her.

The sight had sunk into his mind, touched the spring of inspiration, and developed his hidden genius.

The words had sunk into her heart, touched there the chords of love and pity, and set them vibrating for evermore.

It took him but a few weeks to throw into shape the thoughts that haunted him, the vision of beauty that filled his brain; and then his name was known forever: for fame is more noisy than love.

But it took her long years to throw into shape the thoughts that his words had set stirring; the vision of things to be done, and good to be accomplished; and no one heard of her: for love works silently, and asks for no reward.

Though his words had remained for a long while dormant in her childish breast, only half understood at the time, and afterwards well-nigh forgotten, yet their memory was never wholly extinguished.

If it grew dim, they would be brought back to her by the scenes around, the sights by which she

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was daily surrounded. When she fled in terror on her pony when a drunken man drew nigh, she was silently learning the lesson those words were meant to teach. While the coachman wondered what made the child so pensive when they passed the noisy public-house, Bill's complaints and reproaches were recurring to her.

As years went on, she saw more clearly his implied reproach; realized *who* was in fault, and where her duty lay; made up her small mind early it should be as he had said, and that when she was older, she would work herself all the improvements that were so sorely needed.

The resolution grew with her growth, and strengthened with her strength, abundantly fed by the meditation for which in her lonely child-life she had so much opportunity.

In her long companionless rides, in the silent rooms at home before her invalid mother came down-stairs, in her quiet musings by the graves of her little brothers and sisters, forever the same idea filled her mind; and, as she blossomed into womanhood, the fruits of her resolution became apparent in the wonderful reformation we have described.

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So this was Wilhelm Tarver's greatest work after all!

He would not say so: he would point to certain carved seats in a German cathedral, or to a beautiful font in one of the old churches, that is the admired of all beholders: but we say no! For in God's sight the humblest work of love far outweighs all the most beautiful works of art that the hand of man can accomplish.

Gifts perish: the hand that creates withers and dies: the sight that directs the hand fails and perishes; and "How dieth the wise man? even as the fool!" but, "Charity never faileth: Love abideth forever!" "Covet earnestly," says St. Paul, at the end of the twelfth chapter of his epistle to the Corinthians, "the best gifts——"

Cultivate, that is, to the utmost, every talent, and every accomplishment that God has given you——

——"And yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

"Now the more excellent way is Charity."

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CHAPTER XV.

AFTER TEN YEARS.

And Bill, far away, carving his way literally and figuratively to fame and fortune, mounting step by step the ladder of success, would still be recalled sometimes to that conversation in the little library at Grinfield, albeit he was unaware of all that had sprung therefrom.

A little wistful face would peep out at him sometimes from amidst the ferns and foliage growing under his shaping hand.

And whereas once the child would recall to him the carving he could not always remember, so now the carving would recall to him the child he could never quite forget.

The fairy form was so indelibly graven on his mind; was so inseparably connected with his first glimpse of art; was so interwoven with the beginning of his success.

Was he likely to forget it?

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Still at times it stood beside him, with its little outstretched hand; still the little face was uplifted, and the plaintive voice would cry, "Why won't you take my hand?"

Still the great eyes, so puzzled and wistful, gazed out from the wild fair hair.

He threw it into shape at last.

A cherub's face, with that wondering expression, began to grow one day under his hand.

And as he carved the eyes and lips, and strove to give them the likeness he remembered, he threw aside his tools, and burying as of old his head, so as to shut out his present surroundings, he listened for the little voice again.

From the far past it must have reached him, for his face was bright when he took up his chisel; a few more strokes, a few more touches, and the face of the child was there!

From that day, all his cherubs bore the same face; and other artists wondered how he carved such speaking features with no live model near.

He would smile, but would never say. However the expression might vary, the face remained the same. Sometimes the cherub was plaintive and peevish; sometimes timid and shy.

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Sometimes he conjured it up laughing roguishly, beckoning with an invisible hand.

At others, imperious and very determined, it insisted on having its way.

But the wistful, puzzled, and mournful expression was ever the one he preferred.

And always, ere he caught it, he must go through the same ceremony again.

He must close his eyes, and bury his head; and strain his memory to the full.

And when he has brought her beside him, he still must make her say, "Why won't you take my hand? Is it because it's so sticky?—You're very, *very* particular, *ain't* you?"

During one long hard winter at Grinfield, the villagers were observed to be remarkably busy. Men and boys were seen in their leisure hours toiling away with painting on wood, carving, and carpentering; and the women and girls giving every spare moment to knitting and other kinds of work. That there was some special end in view, it was easy to see; and on Midsummer Day, the eighteenth birthday of Miss Herbert of the Big House, the mystery was solved.

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For on that day Grinfield held its first Industrial Exhibition!

Many were the contributions from every cottage in the neighborhood, and wonderfully pretty and ingenious were some of the articles displayed.

But the greatest contribution of all, and the one of which the villagers were most proud, was a beautifully-carved antique chair for the new chancel of the church; which had been sent all the way from Germany, by Herr Wilhelm Tarver.

Visitors to the Exhibition were told with just pride that the contributor was one of the most celebrated carvers of the day; and that he had been brought up at Grinfield.

On the back of the chair was a profusion of flowers and foliage, which had almost the lightness of nature; and from their midst peeped out a cherub, with a mass of tangled hair.

There was something about the face of this cherub that attracted the attention of the villagers, besides its beauty as a work of art.

Many gazed at it long, and returned to gaze again.

It seemed to them familiar, and yet they knew not why.

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One or two *thought* they detected a likeness; but then, again, thought they were mistaken, and with a shake of the head, passed on.

For to them Miss Herbert is a tall, fair girl, with earnest eyes, and thoughtful brow; a beautiful woman, whose presence alone brings rest and consolation, and whose voice and step are known and loved in every cottage home.

Only to him will she always be a fairy child of seven; a little queen of art and beauty; a tiny creature stretching out her hand to him, with wondering eyes, and a mass of wild fair hair.

THE END.

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